GARRY KASPAROV

Steinitz

Lasker

Capablanca

Alekhine

ON MY GREAT PREDECESSORS

PART I

EVERYMAN CHESS

a modern history of the early development of chess

GARRY KASPAROV

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PART I

with the participation of Dmitry Plisetsky

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EVERYMAN CHESS

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Introduction

The Champions as Symbols of their Time

For quite some time I have been wanting to write a book on the new and modern history of chess. And moreover, deviating from the traditional approach, to demonstrate the continuous progress of the game through the play of the world champions. Since it is this elite group of super-stars (only 14 in 117 years!) that has made the greatest contribution to chess: to win the supreme title, they had to overcome the best of the best, discover something new, and catch highly experienced and talented opponents unawares.

According to official legend, a slow war game not unlike chess originated nearly two thousand years ago in India, and, undergoing slight changes, made the endlessly long journey through the south of Central Asia, Persia and the Arab countries of the Middle East, to the Iberian Peninsula. However, the ‘Indian’ version of the origin of chess became known to Europeans only at the end of the 17th century. Only one thing can he stated with certainty: *modern chess* originated in the 15th century on the Mediterranean. And this is already a purely European invention – an intellectual game, modelling psychological warfare.

The best chess masters of every epoch have been closely linked with the values of the society in which they lived and worked. All the changes of a cultural, political and psychological background are reflected in the style and ideas of their play. This deep connection can be traced back a long time. Was it not logical that, in the era of the Renaissance, in the 15th-17th centuries, chess developed most rapidly in Spain and Italy? Was it an accident that the first maestro, who tried to create a theory of positional play, lived in the epoch of the Enlightenment and of the philosophy of rationalism – the great François-André Philidor (incidentally, a well-known composer and a friend of Diderot)? And remember the slogan that he proclaimed in the middle of the 18th century – ‘The pawns are the soul of chess!’ Do we not hear in this echoes of the coming Great French Revolution?

Later, in the first half of the 19th century, in full accordance with geopolitical reality, chess was the arena for battles between the best players from England and France: McDonnell-La Bourdonnais, Staunton-Saint-Amant ... In the middle of the century the outstanding chess romantic Adolf Anderssen was the leading player. His style was that of reckless attacks on the king, with mind-boggling sacrifices, personifying the triumph of mind over matter (fully typical of an educated German, and not alien to the ideas of Hegel and Schopenhauer).

We also remember the brilliant flight of the American super-genius Paul Morphy, who in a couple of years (1857-59) conquered both the New and the Old Worlds. He revealed a thunderous blend of pragmatism, aggression and accurate calculation to the world – qualities that enabled America to accomplish a powerful spurt in the second half of the 19th century.

The London international tournament of 1883 intrigued the public: who was in fact the stronger – Wilhelm Steinitz or Johann Hermann Zukertort? And in 1886 (only after Morphy’s death!) they finally met in an official match for the title ‘Champion of the World’. That was how this title arose – the result of public recognition of the result of a match between the two strongest players on the planet. Running through the fourteen champions of the world, we again observe an inseparable link between chess and social surroundings.

Wilhelm Steinitz (world champion 1886-1894)

Steinitz effectively dominated chess from the early 1870s. He was an ardent follower of the scientific method, which could, in his opinion, provide the key to the solving of any problems arising on the chessboard. He was the first to divide a position into its component elements, to pick out its most important factors, and to state the general principles of strategy. This was a great discovery, a turning point in chess history! But in practice Steinitz often overestimated the importance of the theory of positional play he had created, and relied excessively on abstract principles. Well, he was a true child of his materialistic time, when there prevailed a naïve belief in the omnipotence of science and in the inevitability that soon all natural processes would be completely understood.

Emanuel Lasker (world champion 1894-1921)

A native of Germany, a Doctor of philosophy and mathematics, Lasker was the first, and at that time the only player to appreciate the importance of psychological factors. While being an excellent tactician and strategist, at the same time he realised that the art of exploiting the opponent's deficiencies was sometimes far more important than the ability to make the most correct moves. A deep knowledge of human psychology and an understanding of the relative value of chess strategy helped him to win almost all the events in which he competed, and to retain the title of champion for 27 long years. An absolute record! And who at that time were the masters of thinking? Of course, Einstein and Freud! As they say, commentary is superfluous ...

José Raúl Capablanca (world champion 1921-1927)

'The chess machine' – this was what the Cuban genius was called, on account of the purity of his playing style. A favourite with the public, he was a person of refined manners and a man of the world. The great Capa crushed his opponents in an apparently offhand manner, with exquisite ease and elegance. Also attractive was the fact that he gained his brilliant victories apparently without any serious preparatory work on chess. But now remember that time – the years of hope and optimism, when the world was enjoying the peace and quiet after the horrors of the First World War. It was at that time that the global export of American cultural values began – from literary bestsellers to Hollywood productions. Stories involving successful heroes, with dazzling smiles and invariable happy endings, healed the wounds of the recent war. And Capa, a successful socialite and a spoilt child of fortune, corresponded excellently with the spirit of the times.

Alexander Alekhine (world champion 1927-1935, 1937-1946)

The product of a rich noble family – and at the same time the first champion of Soviet Russia! Even before this he had known much sorrow in the hard times of war and revolution. Then came emigration to France, the diploma of Doctor of Law, the grandiose battle with Capablanca, years of travelling, victories and defeats, the Second World War, tournaments in occupied Europe, then accusations of collaboration with the Nazis and the threat of disqualification ... Alekhine’s style was the embodiment of psychological aggression. Enormous preparatory work, explosive energy at the board, and a maniacal striving to finish off the opponent, together with rich combinative imagination. All this amazingly resembles the devastating wars that shook Europe in the first half of the 20th century. Towards the end, the pendulum of Alekhine’s life was about to swing back: the new Soviet champion Botvinnik officially challenged him to a match for the world crown. However, the king died prematurely, thus remaining undefeated.

Max Euwe (world champion 1935-1937)

A symbol of the age of scientific and technological revolution, the start of the era of atomic energy and the computer. An earnest follower and populariser of the teachings of Steinitz, ‘a pragmatist, who studied everything that had been published in chess,’ Euwe was also a Doctor of Mathematics and a prominent specialist in electronics; at one time he was chairman of the Euroatom commission on chess programming. He was the first of the chess kings to become President of FIDE (1970), not without the influence of Botvinnik, who thought that ‘only a chessplayer who has been world champion can understand the importance of the firm and just rules for conducting competitions for the world championship.’

Mikhail Botvinnik (world champion 1948-1957, 1958-1960, 1961-1963)

From his youth a staunch communist. The cold, merciless style of the Patriarch of the Soviet Chess School, based on deep opening and psychological preparation – is this not a symbol of the might of the Stalin regime! In order to play at the highest level, Botvinnik studied chess very seriously, scientifically and professionally. He was champion in the initial years of the Cold War, when sport emerged into the world political arena, and was transformed into an instrument in the ideological battle between East and West. But professional sport was then only in its infancy, while science was being drawn into atomic, cosmic and computer ventures. I should remind you that Botvinnik was a Doctor of Technology and one of the pioneers of chess programming.

Vasily Smyslov (world champion 1957-1958)

Undoubtedly a symbol of the early thaw, the comparatively libertarian era. The death of Stalin, the 20th Communist Party Congress, the start of the rehabilitation of the victims of repression, the world youth festival in Moscow ... Onto the chess throne climbed a mild, intelligent man with a fine baritone voice, who had dreamed of a singing career. He was not a communist, and his deep religiousness as though anticipated the approaching rebirth of the Orthodox Church. In addition, Smyslov's style was much lighter and more airy compared with Botvinnik's tank-like onslaught. These giants played three matches against each other! Alas, Smyslov, who was then clearly the strongest player in the world, did not hold the championship for long: the previous era did not want to give way.

Mikhail Tal (world champion 1960-1961)

Although his tenure of the championship lasted a record short time, Tal undoubtedly remains one of the brightest stars in the history of chess. His daring, risky style with its stunning combinations and sacrifices, his youth, irrepressible optimism and wit – all this reflected the hopes of Soviet society, which had barely awoken after the darkness of Stalinism and had eagerly breathed a gulp of freedom in the Khrushchev thaw. Tal became champion in 1960, but his sparkling play won over the public as early as 1956. His victory over Botvinnik was the triumph of a restless poet over a cold materialistic technician (in 1951 Bronstein had come close to this, but the time had not yet arrived). But in the return match held a year later the young romantic had no chance of success against the 'bulwark of the Soviet system'. Incidentally, it was in 1961 that the first signs of the ending of the thaw appeared. The hard-line supporters had triumphed ...

Tigran Petrosian (world champion 1963-1969)

The ideal son of his time, who replaced Botvinnik. This was the period of the ‘early Brezhnev’, a time of the methodical tightening of the screws. The proceedings against Brodsky, the trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the complete stifling of freedom of speech ... Belief in communist ideals lessened, and its place was taken by conformism, reticence, caution and discretion. And for Petrosian, with his difficult childhood, sober prudence and enormous natural talent, these qualities were present in full measure.

Boris Spassky (world champion 1969-1972)

A kind of Soviet dandy, the master of the spectacular attack, a natural actor on the chess stage. Also a great talent, but at the same time a bold and independent person, known for his caustic, unprejudiced comments. In contrast to other celebrities, he never clung to power, did not try to get anything out of it and never tried to squeeze political capital out of his name. Spassky’s dissident behaviour, like that of a number of prominent figures in science and culture, reflected the growing hostility of the post-Stalin generation of Soviet people to the decaying regime. A new wave of emigration began ... In 1976 Spassky also escaped to freedom, married a French woman and moved to a suburb of Paris. But he was deprived of the red flag and his stipend from the USSR Sports Committee only after Linares 1983, where the former world champion took first place, ahead of the current champion Karpov.

Robert James Fischer (world champion 1972-1975)

The most restless and ambiguous champion. By achieving unprecedented successes he became a living legend. Fischer’s energetic style is that of a ‘killer at the chessboard’: monstrous purposefulness, furious pressure, sweeping away everything in its path ... The lone genius challenged the formidable Soviet Chess School – and, to the delight of the West, he won! He firmly and uncompromisingly demanded improvements in playing conditions, and respect for chess and chessplayers. Fischer modernised practically all aspects of the ancient game and could well have implemented its conversion onto professional lines. But due to certain traits of his character and his extreme individualism, in the end he became a recluse and slipped out of the onward process of chess development. A pity, since it could have been brought onto a fundamentally different level only by Fischer – an outstanding contemporary of the Beatles, hippies and mass disturbances by students, demanding greater individual freedom ...

Anatoly Karpov (world champion 1975-1985)

Karpov's powerful instinct for survival, multiplied by his unique chess talent, gave birth to a super-solid alloy of Lasker's psychological refinement with Capablanca's impeccable, machine-like technique. A favourite of Brezhnev and a vivid symbol of 'stagnation' – the last decade of the regime, when the USSR invaded Afghanistan, and the party authorities, hiding behind the screen of the decayed ideology, did everything to engage in personal enrichment. Precisely during these years the International Chess Federation (FIDE) became an organisation run by the countries of the socialist camp and the Third World, and effectively by the Soviet Union and its world champion Anatoly Karpov. Corruption, stagnation, cynicism and conformism – these were the typical features of Soviet reality in the twilight communist era. But the West accepted the idea of the peaceful coexistence of the two systems and was ready to live with double standards for a long time yet. The two matches for the world crown between Karpov and Korchnoi (1978 and 1981) are an excellent illustration of that period. Korchnoi, even after becoming a Westerner and enlisting the support of the free world, was unable to withstand the heartless might of the Soviet machine.

Garry Kasparov (world champion 1985-2000)

I see my own style as being a kind of symbiosis of the styles of Alekhine, Tal and Fischer. I became champion in the historic year of 1985, the first year of Gorbachev's perestroika, which led to the break-up of the USSR and a fundamental change in the map of the world. A storm of change swept the planet, overturning the lives of millions of people. In chess too the old order could not survive. After a number of desperate attempts to reanimate the past (a further three matches with Karpov!), it nevertheless broke away on a new path and is aiming to become one of the main types of professional sport. However, many changes still lie ahead – both in chess, and in the world as a whole.

Vladimir Kramnik (world champion 2000-?)

On the border of the 20th and 21st centuries, in Russia, and also in the West, it became the time of the pragmatic market and questions such as 'What is your company worth?' or 'How much are your shares?' And there came into chess a person who personified this approach with his style of play and life. The champion-like scale of his talent was evident back in the early-90s, when I insisted on the inclusion of Volodya in the Russian Olympiad team, but his chess style reached completion only by the time of our match in 2000. This is the height of pragmatism, a quaint synthesis of the psychological insight of Lasker, the deep opening preparation of Botvinnik and the extraordinary tenacity of Karpov, whose collection of games was Kramnik's bedside book ...

A truly symbolic place for the history of chess is Prague – a city where in May 1836 the first world champion Steinitz was born, and where in May 2002 the FIDE President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, together with the 13th and 14th champions, signed a 'Resolution for uniting the chess world'. A line was thereby drawn under the historic dispute regarding to whom the title 'Champion of the World' belongs: as a result of the unification, the only rightful owner and the only organisation, staging the official world championships, remains FIDE. This was a serious, but necessary concession on the part of the champions: today there is no other way of attracting money into chess from big corporations and of ensuring a decent living for hundreds of professionals.

Next in turn is the creation of dynamic system for conducting the world championship – a two-year cycle, consisting of a qualifying knock-out tournament, quarter-final and semi-final candidates matches and a match for the world championship of 12 games; moreover, the champion will now join in at the semi-final stage, and subsequently even at the quarter-final.

To all appearances, the former significance and symbolism of the title 'Champion of the World' will fade into the past. What can be done? The rapid acceleration in the tempo of life, and the overall computerisation and commercialisation also exert an enormous influence on chess. Its development is entering a new stage – the practical realisation of accumulated ideas, and at the forefront is the competitive element. It is possible that my match with Kramnik (London 2000) will be the last to make serious changes to our understanding of the game ...

Tal once made the fair comment that the history of the battle for the world championship is created not only by the champions, but also by their brilliant rivals. And indeed, apart from the world champions there is another small elite group of players who have played an enormous role in the development of chess (some of them were very close to the supreme title and did not win it, perhaps only due to mysterious caprices of fate). One remembers the names of Zukertort, Chigorin, Tarrasch, Pillsbury, Schlechter, Rubinstein, Nimzowitsch, Réti, Keres, Bronstein, Geller, Larsen, Polugayevsky, Korchnoi ... Of course, their fates are also inseparable from their times, and I will endeavour to talk at least briefly about each of these chess giants.

But now it is time to be on our way. Awaiting you is a wonderful collection of masterpieces, created by the best chessplayers in the world and studied under the microscope of the latest analytical computer programs; hence – a great number of amazing finds and discoveries. I hope that this work will make it possible to see the colossal evolution of chess during the past one hundred and fifty years, which is fully comparable with scientific and technological progress.

I hope also that my book will interest not only professionals and inveterate chess enthusiasts, but also those who are not yet imbued with a deep love for this ancient, truly royal game.

Garry Kasparov
April 2003

Chapter One

Chess before Steinitz

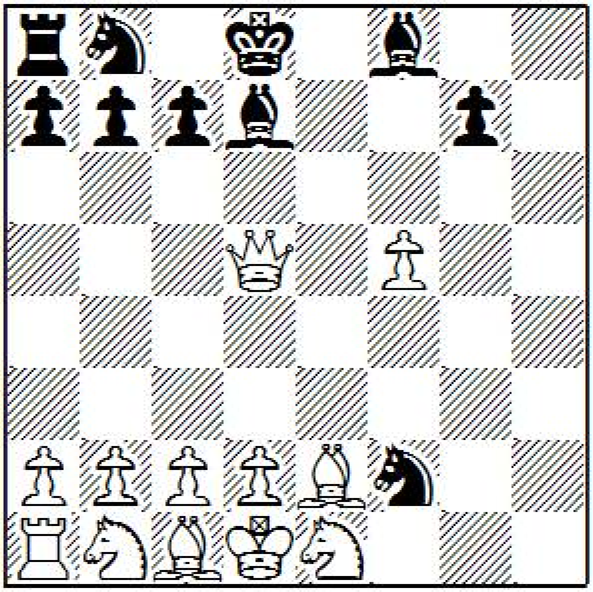
The stages in the development of chess resemble the path taken by everyone who proceeds from a beginner to a player of high standard. Initially they all unconsciously reproduce the manner of play in the 16th and 17th centuries: never missing a chance to give check, bring the queen immediately into play and, not thinking about the development of all the pieces, launch a dashing attack on the king. The combination either succeeds, or suddenly turns out to be completely incorrect. The level of defence is terrible and there is a complete absence of any deep plan.

This style, inspired by the talent and imagination of the performers, became known in chess as the 'Italian School'. A manuscript of its legendary representative Gioacchino Greco (1600-1634) is full of miniatures resembling those that occur with all novices:

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Qf6? 3 Bc4 Qg6 4 0-0 Qxe4? 5 Bxf7+! Ke7 6 Re1 Qf4 7 Rxe5+ Kxf7 8 d4 Qf6 9 Ng5+ Kg6 10 Qd3+ Kh5 11 g4+ and mate;

1 e4 e6 2 d4 Nf6?! 3 Bd3 Nc6 4 Nf3 Be7 5 h4 0-0? 6 e5 Nd5 7 Bxh7+! Kxh7 8 Ng5+ Bxg5 9 hxg5+ Kg6 10 Qh5+ Kf5 11 Qh7+ g6 12 Qh3+ Ke4 13 Qd3 mate;

1 e4 e5 2 f4 f5?! 3 exf5 Qh4+ 4 g3 Qe7 5 Qh5+?! (5 fxe5! Qxe5+ 6 Qe2 is better) 5 ... Kd8 6 fxe5 Qxe5+ 7 Be2 (7 Qe2! Qxf5 8 Bh3) 7 ... Nf6 8 Qf3 d5 9 g4? h5! 10 h3? hxg4 11 hxg4 Rxh1 12 Qxh1 Qg3+ 13 Kd1 Nxg4 14 Qxd5+ Bd7 15 Nf3 Nf2+ 16 Ke1 Nd3+ 17 Kd1 Qe1+ 18 Nxe1 Nf2 mate.



What is this, if not a monument to the era! Just take a look at White’s queenside ...

However, Greco also has some theoretically valuable variations – for example, a famous attack with a rook sacrifice in the Italian Game: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 Bb4+ 7 Nc3 Nxe4 8 0-0 Nxc3 (8 ... Bxc3!) 9 bxc3 Bxc3? (9 ... d5 is better) 10 Qb3 (10 Ba3! is even stronger) 10 ... Bxa1? (10 ... d5!) 11 Bxf7+! Kf8 12 Bg5 Ne7 13 Ne5! Bxd4 (or 13 ... d6 14 Bg6!) 14 Bg6! d5 15 Qf3+ Bf5 16 Bxf5 Bxe5 17 Be6+ Bf6 18 Bxf6 and wins.

‘The masters of that time,’ writes Lasker, ‘found a sound and fruitful plan: disregarding pawns, achieve a rapid development of the pieces for a swift attack on the enemy king. To oppose this, a counter-plan was worked out: develop the pieces in solid positions, accept the sacrifices and then win thanks to material superiority. The masters of the first type found and carried out brilliant combinations, whereas the masters of the second type devised the systematic exchange as a means of weakening and in the end parrying the attack. The masters of the first type were the inventors of gambits, whereas the second type discovered the Giuoco Piano (*i.e. ‘quiet play’ in the Italian Game: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 d3 or 4 Nc3 – Garry Kasparov, subsequently referred to as G.K.*), the fianchetto and the

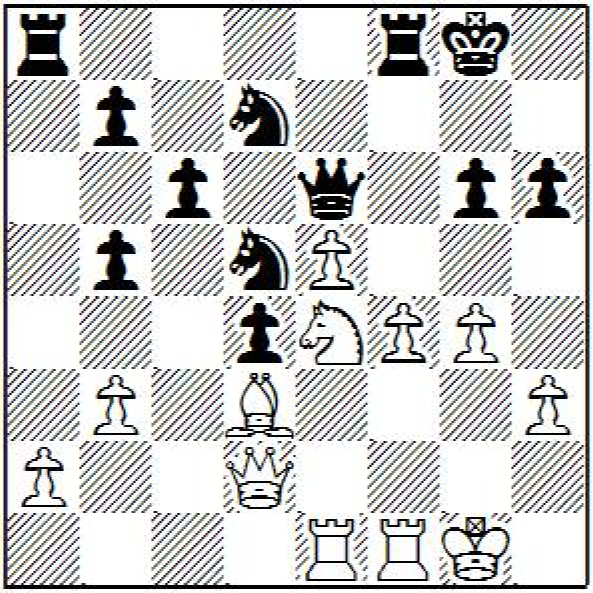
Sicilian Defence.’ Who could have known then that the modest ‘Sicilian’ would become the main and sharpest opening of our times?

The gambit-combinative mood reigned in chess until the mid-18th century, until the appearance of François-André Danican Philidor (1726-1795), an outstanding player and, incidentally, a well-known composer, one of the founders of French comic opera. In his youth Philidor used to visit the Café de la Régence in Paris, where he learned the game from the strongest French player Legall (who does not remember the famous mate which bears his name: 1 e4 e5 2 Bc4 d6 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 Nc3 g6? 5 Nxe5! Bxd1 6 Bxf7+ Ke7 7 Nd5 mate). In a match in 1747 he crushed the talented Syrian player Stamma, the inventor of the algebraic notation and the author of a popular collection of 100 problem and study positions (1737).

Philidor was so much stronger than his contemporaries, that from that point until the end of his life he played them all, only by giving away odds. Therefore the most significant chess event of the era was not his victories at the board, but his creation of an absolutely innovatory manual *L’analyse du jeu des Échecs* (1749, 1777, altogether about 100 editions!). Philidor was the first to subject the openings to a systematic, scientific study and to draw up certain general playing principles.

As a counter to the reckless piece attacks in the style of the Italian School, which in the 18th century were personified by the masters from Modena – Lolli, del Rio and Ponziani, he was the first to put forward a *positional plan*, based on a distinctive pawn theory: ‘Pawns are the soul of chess; on their correct or bad arrangement depends the success of attack or defence; the art of playing with them decides the fate of the game.’

Pawns in front, pieces to the rear – this, expressed briefly, was Philidor’s plan. I will give a typical example from *L’analyse*, illustrating this argument.



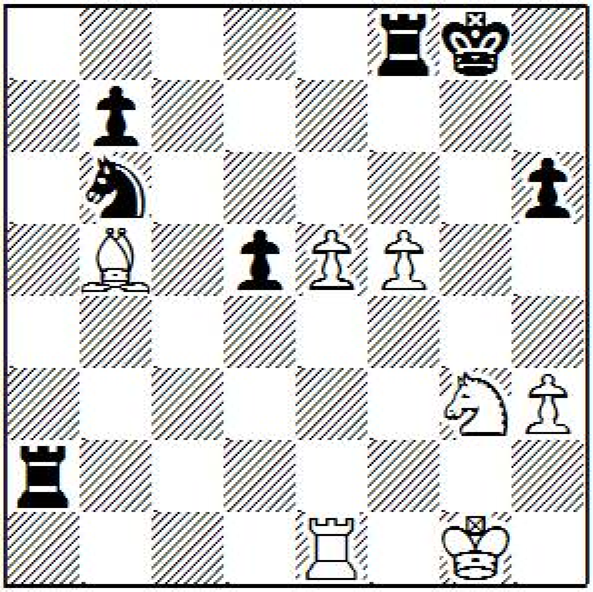
23 Ng3 (with the unequivocal threat of f4-f5) **23 ... Ne3**

The knight advances to cut off communications between [the white] pieces and break the strength of [his] pawns; which he would undoubtedly do, by pushing his g-pawn; but [White] prevents him by sacrificing [his] rook.' (Philidor)

24 Rxe3! dxe3 25 Qxe3 Rxa2 (the inhibiting 25 ... Rae8 would appear to be more tenacious, although here too White has an appreciable advantage) **26 Re1!**

'So that the e5- pawn should not be left in the lurch when f4-f5 is played.' (Philidor)

26 ... Qxb3 27 Qe4 Qe6 28 f5! gxf5 29 gxf5 (here it is, Philidor's dream!) **29 ... Qd5 30 Qxd5+ cxd5 31 Bxb5** (White does not even have a pawn for the exchange, but his pair of connected passed pawns is very strong) **31 ... Nb6**



32 f6 ‘If you have a light-squared bishop, you should place your pawns on dark squares; if a dark-squared bishop, then on light squares. Since then your bishop will prevent the enemy pieces from establishing themselves between your pawns.’ One of the classic rules of Philidor, which was later adopted by Steinitz.

32 ... Rb2 33 Bd3 Kf7 34 Bf5 Nc4 35 Nh5 (with the unavoidable e5-e6) **35 ... Rg8+ 36 Bg4 Nd2 37 e6+ Kg6 38 f7.** ‘Then the pawn (e6) promotes to a queen and White wins.’ For example, 38 ... Rf8 39 Nf4+ Kg7 40 Bh5 and e6-e7.

Philidor discovered the eternal principle of the coordination of the forces – ‘genuine attacks are carried out by the united efforts of many pieces’ (in this respect his best pupil was Morphy) – and he formulated several other valuable rules:

1. ‘An attack should never be begun before the pawns leading it are thoroughly supported’ (and they should be deployed in a compact chain – a phalanx).

2. ‘Pawns, especially central ones, that have advanced to the fifth rank, lose part of their strength, since then they can easily be attacked by the enemy pawns from the sixth rank’ (a direct panegyric upon the Alekhine Defence!).

3. ‘It is always advantageous to exchange your f-pawn for the e-pawn, since this leads to the seizure of the centre and, in addition, to the opening of a file for the rook’ (the ideology of the King’s Gambit and an opening of the 19th century – the Vienna Game).

Play in accordance with the pawn theory was often protracted, concluding deep in the endgame. Philidor’s investigative gift vividly displayed itself in this field too: an enormous step forward was provided by his now classical analyses of the endings ‘rook and pawn against rook’, ‘rook and bishop against rook’, ‘queen against rook and pawn’, and so on. It is from typical endgame positions that the *concept of a plan* originates.

However, the problem for the further development of chess was that the great French master was too far ahead of his time: no one was able to play successfully in the manner proposed by him – it all reduced to protracted and fruitless manoeuvring. The chess world was simply not yet ready for the general principles of positional play, especially in closed positions, and for more than half of the 19th century the romantic trend of the Italian School dominated – which, nevertheless, as we shall see, greatly enriched chess.

The First Matches for the Crown

After the death of Philidor, for a long time there was no clearly strongest player in Europe. In the early 1820s the contenders for this role were Frenchman Alexander Louis Deschapelles (1780-1847) and the prominent British chess writer William Lewis (1787-1870). Then it was their pupils who became the leaders – Louis Charles de la Bourdonnais (1795-1840) and Alexander McDonnell (1798-1835).

La Bourdonnais was born into a distinguished noble family, but he gradually squandered his wealth and earned his living from chess alone – in those days this was a thankless occupation even for the very best, and the great maestro was barely able to make ends meet. Although he had studied Philidor’s *L’Analyse*, he nevertheless played in a different, intuitive attacking style, in keeping with his own temperament. In the words of Lasker, ‘However the adversary chose to march his troops, intrepidly La Bourdonnais followed him and fought for the centre of the board with courage and imagination.’

In 1833 he published a manual *New treatise on the game of chess* (also published later in Russia), where for the first time advice was given on how to work independently with a chess book and learn to calculate variations in the mind. And in 1836 la Bourdonnais founded the world's first chess periodical – the monthly *Le Palamède* (the name of a mythical Greek hero, a participant in the Trojan War, to whom in France the invention of chess was attributed for a long time; in my view, this is indirect evidence of its Mediterranean origin: the myth could well have arisen after the real wars of the 13th-15th centuries).

Back in 1824, on a visit to London, La Bourdonnais crushed the English masters and was proclaimed by his compatriots as 'the greatest chess player in Europe.' The English tolerated this position for 10 years, until the time a worthy opponent to the Frenchman appeared.

The Irishman Alexander McDonnell (1798-1835) was a merchant, the secretary of a respectable trading firm, i.e. quite a prosperous man and, in contrast to La Bourdonnais, a chess amateur. A player of sharp combinative style, from the outset he would launch into a fierce battle and often had to pay for this. One only has to think of his provocative gambit **1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3 g5 4 Bc4 g4 5 Nc3?!** (if White does not want to play 5 Ne5, then the Polerio-Muzio Gambit 5 0-0 really is better) **5 ... gxf3 6 Qxf3.** One of his match games with La Bourdonnais continued 6 ... Bh6 7 d4! Nc6 8 0-0 Nxd4? 9 Bxf7+ Kxf7 10 Qh5+ Kg7 11 Bxf4, and another 6 ... Nc6 7 d4 Nxd4 8 Bxf7+ Kxf7 9 Qh5+ Kg7 10 0-0 also with an attack for White, although after 6 ... d6! 7 d4 Be6 the advantage is with Black.

The organiser of the series of six matches between McDonnell and La Bourdonnais was another pupil of William Lewis – George Walker, a theoretician, historian and writer, the founder of the Westminster Club. The famous 'Westminster marathon' (London 1834) was essentially the first battle for the chess crown, the forerunner of official matches for the world championship. The winner, as is well known, was La Bourdonnais: +45 -27 =13 (according to other sources, +44 -30 =14). The following remarkable game has remained for ever as the French master's visiting card.

Game 1

A.McDonnell-L.La Bourdonnais

Fourth match, London 1834, 16th game

Sicilian Defence B32

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3

In the Parisian Café de la Régence they preferred 2 f4 – in his time Deschapelles had asserted that ‘any other move is advantageous to Black’, and McDonnell several times played this against La Bourdonnais, but after 2 ... Nc6 3 Nf3 e6 4 c3 d5 5 e5 f6 and ... Nh6 the Frenchman was more successful (+4 -8 =1). Later Staunton also thought that 2 Nf3 was a mistake and that 2 f4, as Saint-Amant played against him, was better. But Morphy categorically disagreed with this, calling 2 f4 ‘a completely incorrect method of play’, and the moves 2 Nf3 and 2 d4 ‘the strongest’. It is clear, wouldn’t you agree, which of these disputants could see into the future ...

2 ... Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5!

The exclamation mark is for the breakthrough in time! La Bourdonnais makes a move which became the starting point of a variation developed 150 years(!) later by grandmaster Sveshnikov. The 12th game of the match went 4 ... Nxd4? 5 Qxd4 e6 6 Bc4?! (6 Nc3! is more accurate) 6 ... Ne7 7 Nc3 Nc6 8 Qd1 Bc5 9 0-0 0-0 with a slightly inferior game.

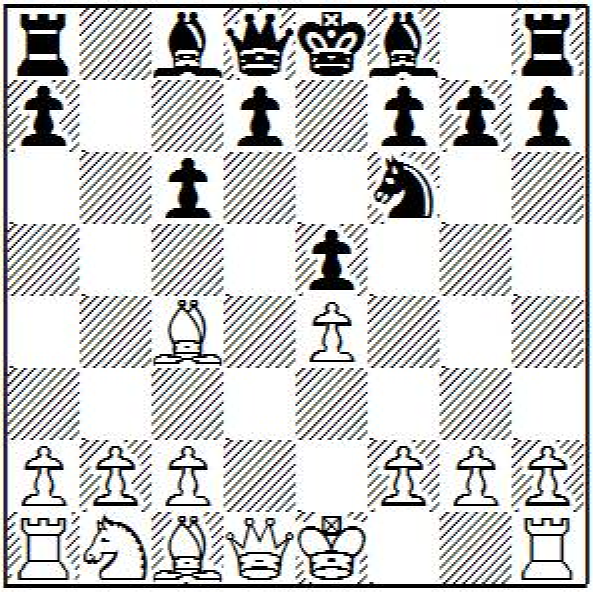
5 Nxc6

Nowadays every schoolboy knows that 5 Nb5 should be played. After this from the late 1950s they used to play 5 ... a6 6 Nd6+ Bxd6 7 Qxd6 Qf6, for example: 8 Qd1 (8 Qa3 or even 8 Qxf6 Nxf6 9 Nc3 is also good) 8 ... Qg6 9 Nc3 Nge7 10 h4 h5 11 Bg5 d5 12 Bxe7 d4 13 Bg5 dxc3 14 bxc3 Qxe4+ 15 Be2 f6 16 Be3 Bg4 with equality, Fischer-Tal, Curaçao Candidates 1962), but 12 exd5! retains an advantage. Then Sveshnikov showed that 5 ... d6! 6 c4 Be7 is more solid – here White has only a minimal initiative.

However, 5 Nxc6 is perhaps better than its reputation. In pre-Steinitzian times they aimed for rapid development and an attack, and did not pay attention to such positional nuances as the weakness of the d5-square.

5 ... bxc6 6 Bc4 Nf6

Löwenthal recommended 6 ... Ba6 (with the idea of 7 Bxa6 Qa5+ and ... Qxa6), but after 7 Nd2 Bxc4 (or 7 ... Qa5 8 0-0 Nf6 9 Qe2) 8 Nxc4 Qe7 9 0-0 Qe6 10 b3 Nf6 11 Bb2 White retains some advantage.



7 Bg5?!

A futile, anti-positional move: why exchange this bishop? Also harmless is 7 Qe2 Be7 8 Nc3 0-0 9 Bg5 Nxe4 (9 ... h6!?) 10 Bxe7 Nxc3 11 Qxe5 Re8 12 0-0 Qxe7 13 Qxc3 d5 14 Bd3 Qd6 with equality, as in a previous game of the same match.

But 7 0-0! is more logical. In the well-known game Morphy-Löwenthal (London 1858) after 7 ... d5?! (7 ... Nxe4?! 8 Re1 d5 is bad because of 9 Rxe4 dxe4? 10 Bxf7+!) 8 exd5 cxd5 9 Bb5+ Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Qxd7 11 Re1 Bd6?! 12 Nc3 (12 Bg5! is more accurate) 12 ... e4? (even the superior 12 ... Qe6 13 Bg5 Bb4 14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 Nxd5 0-0-0 16 c4 Bxe1 17 Qxe1 would have left White with the initiative) 13 Bg5 Black encountered great difficulties. However, in the event of 7 ... Be7! 8 Nc3 0-0 9 Qd3 d6 White would have been unable to count on anything. He has a free game, it is true, so the outcome of the opening is acceptable for both sides ...

7 ... Be7 (the 11th game of the match went 7 ... Bc5 8 0-0 h6 9 Bxf6 Qxf6) **8 Qe2?!**

I agree with Chigorin, who proposed 8 Nc3 Bb7 9 Qe2 d5 10 Rd1. After 10 ... d4 11 0-0 0-0 12 Nb1 c5 13 Nd2 Nd7 Black is alright, but for the moment White too has not yet spoiled anything.

8 ... d5

This is more energetic than 8 ... 0-0, as recommended by a number of commentators.

9 Bxf6?

But this is a serious error. ‘White could have advantageously simplified the game: 9 exd5 cxd5 10 Bb5+ Bd7 11 Bxd7+ Nxd7 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Nc3 with pressure on the central pawns.’ (Neishtadt) Excuse me: after 13 ... d4 14 Nd5 Qd6 15 c4 0-0 16 0-0 Nb6! this pressure is worthless.

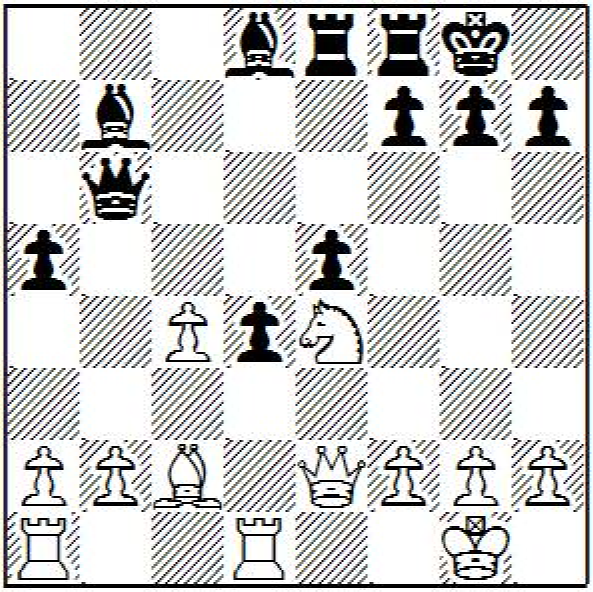
9 ... Bxf6 10 Bb3 0-0 11 0-0 a5 (with the threats of 12 ... a4 and 12 ... Ba6) **12 exd5 cxd5 13 Rd1 d4 14 c4?**

Apparently the decisive mistake: it was wrong to allow Black’s pawns to become passed, since it does not prove possible to blockade them on the light squares. After 14 Nd2 a4 15 Bc4 a3 16 b3 Bb7 White would simply have stood worse (the opponent has the two bishops, the centre, and so on), but he could still have held on.

14 ... Qb6 15 Bc2 Bb7 16 Nd2 Rae8

The greedy 16 ... Qxb2? would have thrown away Black’s entire advantage: 17 Qd3 g6 18 Rab1 e4! 19 Nxe4 (19 Rxb2 exd3 20 Bxd3 is equal) 19 ... Bxe4 20 Rxb2 Bxd3 with a probable draw.

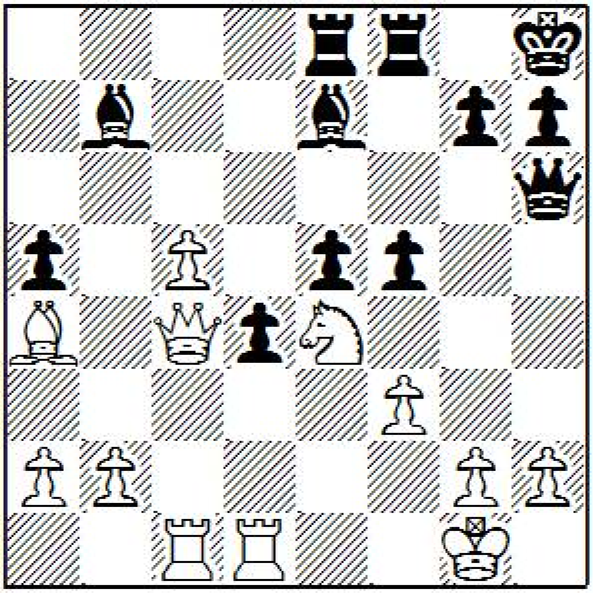
17 Ne4 (even so, 17 Be4!? was more tenacious) **17 ... Bd8** (17 ... Be7!? was also good)



18 c5 Qc6 19 f3 Be7 20 Rac1 f5!

The beginning of the end: the bishops are firing from afar, and the pawns break through in the centre, for which Black does not begrudge giving up the exchange!

21 Qc4+ Kh8 (but not 21 ... Qd5? 22 Qb5 Bc6 in view of 23 Bb3 Bxb5 24 Bxd5+ Kh8 25 Nd6 Bxd6 26 cxd6 Rf6 27 Rc5 Rb8 28 f4!, when it is now Black who is worse: 28 ... e4 29 Bb7! Bd7 30 Rxd4! Rxb7 31 Rc7 Rxb2 32 Rxd7) **22 Ba4 Qh6**



23 Bxe8?

The last possibility of sharpening the play was 23 Nd6! Bxd6 24 Bxe8 (or 24 cxd6 Rc8 and wins) 24 ... Bc7 25 c6 e4 26 cxb7 Qxh2+ 27 Kf1 exf3 28 gxf3 Bg3! (Romanovsky only considered 28 ... Qh3+ 29 Ke2 Rxe8+ 30 Kd3 Qxf3+ 31 Kc2 Qxb7 32 Qxd4, although even here after 32 ... h6 Black is slightly better) 29 Qxd4 Rxe8, and now not 30 Rd2? Qh1+ 31 Qg1 Qxf3+ 32 Rf2 Bxf2 33 Qxf2 Qxb7 with two extra pawns (Neishtadt), but the computer move 30 Rc3!, and Black still has to work for his win: 30 ... h5! 31 f4 h4 32 b8Q! Rxb8 33 Rd2 Qh1+ 34 Ke2 Qe1+ 35 Kd3 Qf1+ 36 Kc2 Bxf4 37 Qf2 Qxf2 38 Rxf2 g5 39 Rxf4 gxf4 40 Rh3 Kg7 41 Rxh4 Rb4 with a won endgame.

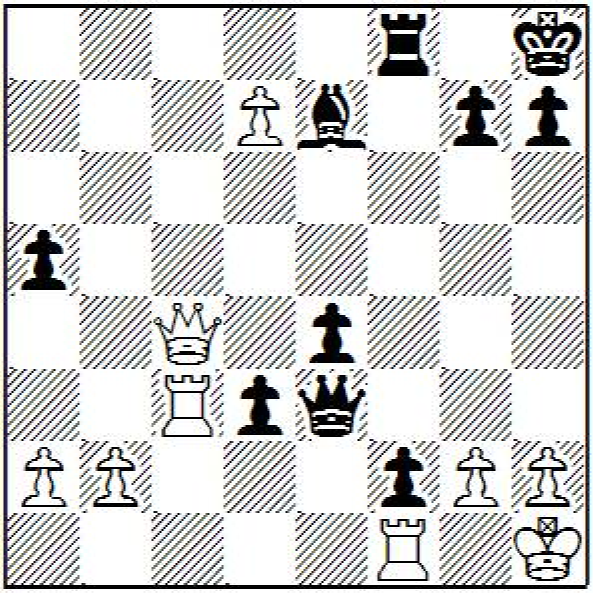
23 ... fxe4! (the avalanche of passed pawns sweeps away everything in its path) **24 c6** (or 24 Qb5 Ba6 25 Qc6 exf3 26 gxf3 Qe3+ 27 Kh1 Be2 and wins) **24 ... exf3 25 Rc2**

White loses after both 25 cxb7? Qe3+ 26 Kh1 fxg2+ 27 Kxg2 Rf2+ 28 Kg1 Re2+ and 25 gxf3 Qe3+ 26 Kh1 Qxf3+ 27 Kg1 Rf5.

25 ... Qe3+ 26 Kh1 Bc8

The computer also suggests 26 ... d3 27 Qxd3 Qxd3 28 Rxd3 f2 29 Rxf2 Rxf2 30 h3 Bc8 31 c7 Rc2 32 Bc6 g6 winning.

27 Bd7 f2 (27 ... d3!?) **28 Rf1 d3 29 Rc3 Bxd7 30 cxd7 e4** (with the threat of 31 ... Qe2 32 Rcc1 e3)

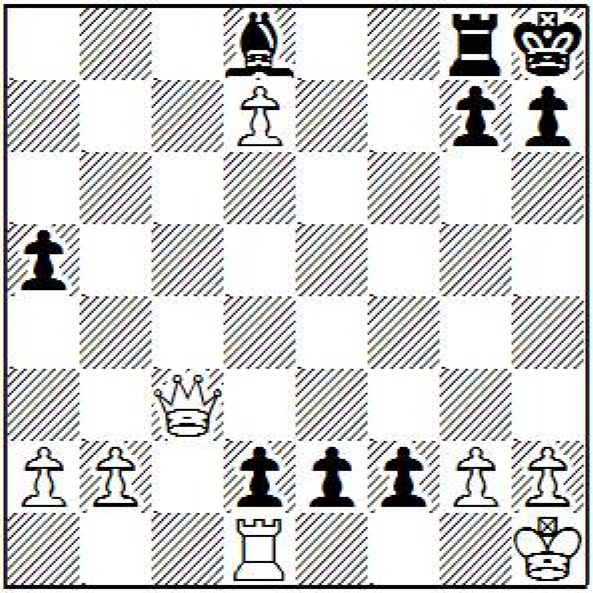


31 Qc8 Bd8

The commentators also pointed out another way to win: 31 ... Rd8!? 32 Rcc1 d2 33 Rcd1 Qe1 (*33 ... Qf4 34 Qc4 Bd6 is also possible – G. K.*) 34 Qc3 e3 35 Rdxe1 dxe1Q 36 Rxe1 Bb4!

32 Qc4 (or 32 Rcc1 d2 33 Rcd1 Qf4! with the threats of 34 ... Bc7 and 34 ... e3) **32 ... Qe1 33 Rc1 d2 34 Qc5 Rg8 35 Rd1 e3 36 Qc3 Qxd1 37 Rxd1 e2 0-1**

What a phalanx! Philidor would certainly have been delighted by such a fantastic pawn surge.



This inimitable finish is one of the most remarkable positions to have occurred in the 19th century!

‘The tactical play of La Bourdonnais, in ensuring the advance of his passed pawns, creates a strong impression,’ writes Yakov Neishtadt in his book *Nekoronovannye Chempiony* (The Uncrowned Champions). ‘And yet to a much greater degree this game reveals his strategic superiority. The combinations of La Bourdonnais were based on a sounder positional foundation. These were the first steps of the strategy that was to be brilliantly demonstrated in the late 1850s by Paul Morphy.’ It is hard not to agree with this: La Bourdonnais did indeed play more deeply than his opponent, seeing strategic trumps which the latter was unaware of, and it was this that decided the matches.

It was enormously regrettable that soon afterwards both of these outstanding players died prematurely. The implacable dispute between England and France was continued by Howard Staunton (1810-1874) and Pierre Charles de Saint-Amant (1800-1872).

Staunton learned to play chess comparatively late in life, and he did not meet either McDonnell or La Bourdonnais in person, but by the early 1840s he was already superior to all his rivals, who gravitated, according to Lasker’s classification given above, towards masters ‘of the second type’. The scale of his chess activity is impressive! A Shakespearian scholar by profession, he nevertheless founded and edited the magazine *Chess Player's Chronicle* (1841-1854), wrote a chess column in the *Illustrated London News* (1845-1874), studied opening theory (in particular, he devised the gambit 1 d4 f5 2 e4!?), published four remarkable chess books: *Chess Player's Handbook* (1847 plus a further 18 editions over the next 70 years), a collection of the games from his three main matches (1849), a collection of the games from the first international tournament in London (1852) and *Chess Praxis* (1860), which also included games by Morphy. He endorsed the famous 'Staunton pieces', which for a century and a half now have been used throughout the world, organised the first international tournament in history and was the first to try and set up an international chess organisation ...

His opponent Saint-Amant was then the best player at the Café de la Régence, that Parisian temple of Caissa, and he enjoyed a considerable reputation not only as a chess player and a successful merchant, but also as an editor (in 1842 he revived *Le Palamède*) and as a representative of France in international chess affairs.

Negotiations about a match proceeded with difficulty, but in November 1843 Staunton finally arrived in Paris and in the hall of the Café de la Régence, with a record crowd of spectators, the clash between the two strongest players of the Old World began. The winner was to be the first to win 11 games. The stir created by this, as the papers wrote, 'great chess battle between France and England' was indeed great! The French were sure that Saint-Amant would win (six months before this he had defeated his opponent in a short match: +3 -2 =1), but bitter disappointment awaited them.

After eight games the score was +7 =1(!) in Staunton's favour, and after the 15th game the Englishman was only one step from his goal: +10 -3 =2. True, this proved to be not an easy one to make: Saint-Amant displayed his tenacity and won in the 16th, 19th and 20th games ... And yet the inevitable was bound to happen.

Game 2

P.Saint-Amant-H.Staunton

Match, Paris 1843, 21st game
Queen's Indian Defence E14

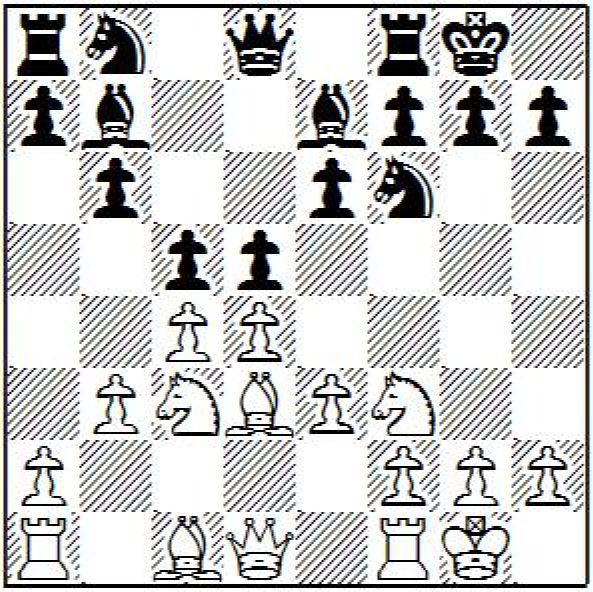
1 d4 d5 2 c4

'The Queen's Gambit ... is a very sound and instructive method of opening the game; less brilliant, because less hazardous, than the gambits on the King's side, but especially improving to the student, from the nicety and correctness of play on both sides which it demands.' (Staunton)

2 ... e6 3 e3 c5 4 Nc3 Nf6 5 Nf3 Be7

Strangely enough, a Tarrasch Defence! Moreover, before this, from the seventh to the 17th game, Staunton played it with its main, symmetrical variation – 5 ... Nc6.

6 Bd3 b6 (6 ... dxc4!) **7 0-0 0-0 8 b3 Bb7**



And now the position on the board is from the 'central variation' of the Queen's Indian Defence.

9 cxd5

A rather premature exchange, provoked by a desire to block the bishop at b7. Nowadays 9 Bb2 cxd4 10 exd4 Nc6 11 Qe2!? or 11 Rc1 would have been played. However, it is hard to condemn seriously the opening and middlegame of this game: the players were proceeding through virgin territory, intuitively trying to grasp the rudiments of positional play.

9 ... exd5 10 Qc2?! (the queen is misplaced here; either 10 Bb2 or 10 Qe2 was better) **10 ... Nc6 11 a3 a6?!**

A superfluous move; if 11 ... Rc8 12 Bf5 did not appeal to Black, then the immediate 11 ... cxd4 really was better.

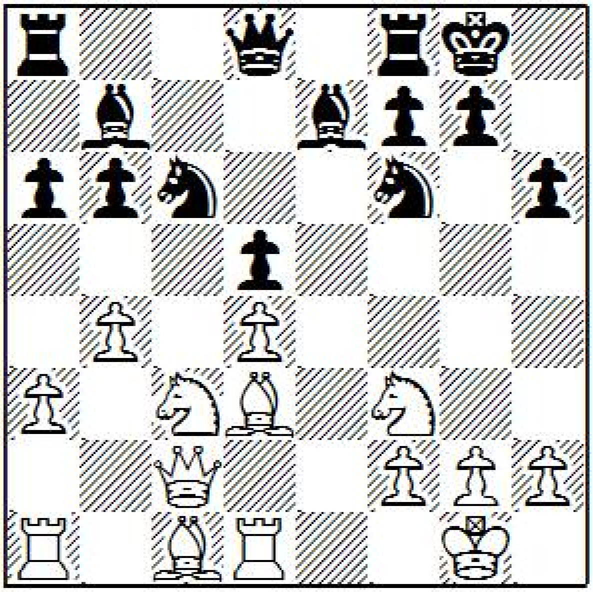
12 Rd1?!

More logical was 12 dxc5!? bxc5 13 Na4, besieging the hanging pawns (13 ... Rc8 14 Qe2, correcting his slight error).

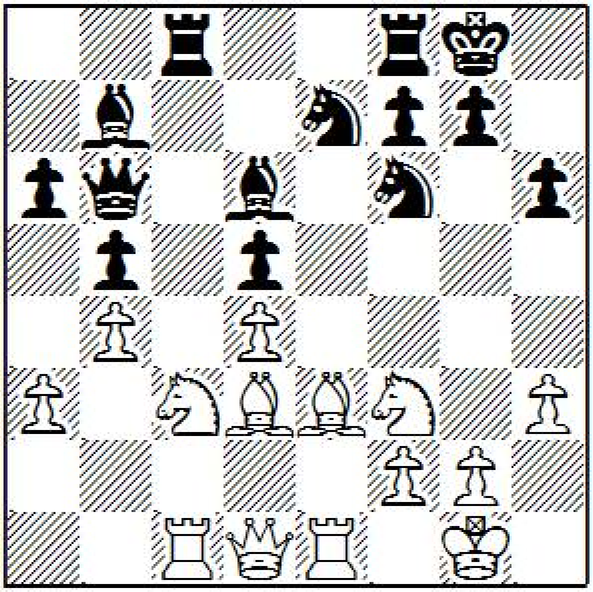
12 ... cxd4 13 exd4 h6

'Preventing the enemy bishop from going to g5 and freeing the knight from having to defend the h7-pawn.' (Saint-Amant)

14 b4?! (an unnecessary weakening; 14 Bf4 was more solid)



14 ... Bd6! 15 Re1 b5 (also not essential) **16 h3 Rc8 17 Qb3 Qc7 18 Bd2 Qb6 19 Be3 Ne7 20 Rac1 Nh5?!** (a rather strange manoeuvre) **21 Qd1! Nf6**

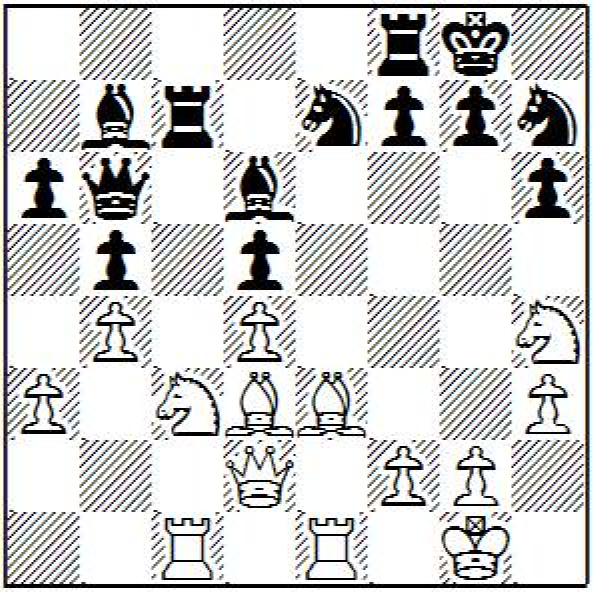


22 Nh4?!

A no less strange manoeuvre. Nowadays any candidate master would without thinking play 22 Ne5! (into the centre, closer to the c5-square), with a slight but enduring advantage.

22 ... Rc7 23 Qd2 Nh7

Also a quite unnecessary move, since after the obvious 23 ... Rfc8! it is bad to play 24 Bxh6? gxh6 25 Qxh6 in view of the counter 25 ... Ne4! (with the threat of ... Bh2+ and ... Qxh6). But ‘just in case’ Staunton defends against the sacrifice ...



24 Qc2 (not 24 Bxh6? gxh6 25 Qxh6?? Bh2+ and ... Qxh6) **24 ... Nf6 25 Kh1?!**

Yet another strange move. As Spassky likes to joke in such cases, ‘if it had been possible, he would have gone to h0 ... ’

25 ... Ne8

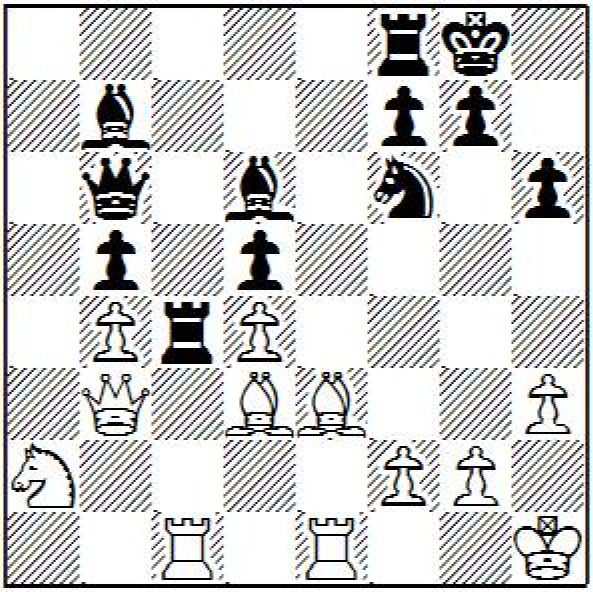
25 ... Bc8! suggests itself, to control f5 and play the bishop to the normal square e6.

26 Nf5?! (an obvious positional mistake, exchanging the passive knight at e7) **26 ... Nxf5 27 Bxf5 a5! 28 Qb3 axb4 29 axb4**

Here the game, which had already lasted more than eight hours, was adjourned for one hour. After that Black launched a counter-offensive and seized the initiative:

29 ... Rc4! 30 Na2 Nf6 31 Bd3

‘In the vain hope of driving away the audacious rook ... ’ (Neishtadt)



31 ... Qc6! (a prototype of the ‘Petrosian’ exchange sacrifice!) **32 Qb2** (32 Bxc4?? dxc4) **32 ... Qd7! 33 Kg1!**

Too dangerous is 33 Bxc4? dxc4 34 Kg1 (parrying the threat of ... Qxh3) 34 ... Nd5 35 Bd2 Bc7! 36 Qc2 Qd6 37 g3 f5 with a powerful attack.

33 ... Nh5

Not even thinking about retreating the rook, although, in my view, the preparation of ... f7-f5 is not very much in keeping with the exchange sacrifice.

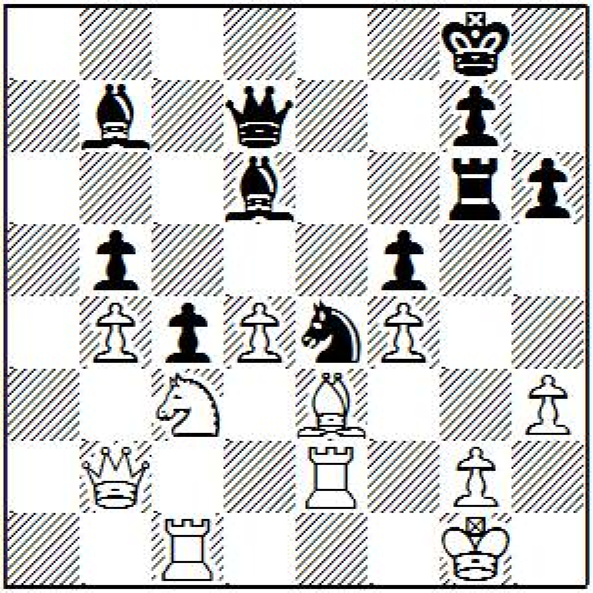
34 Qd2?!

For some reason the commentators did not mention that here 34 Bxc4 dxc4 35 Nc3 followed by d4-d5 was now possible. Of course, Black has full compensation for the exchange, but nothing terrible for White is apparent.

34 ... f5 35 f4?

A positional blunder, catastrophically weakening the light squares. 35 Bxc4 dxc4 36 f3, not mentioned by anyone, was better. In the game Spassky-Petrosian (Moscow 7th matchgame 1966) in a similar position White had to play f2-f4, whereas here nothing forced him to do so! However, all these errors are excusable: this happened nearly 160 years ago, and one can merely remark on the gigantic progress in chess mastery.

35 ... Ng3 36 Bxc4 (nevertheless ...) **36 ... dxc4!** (activating the bishop at b7) **37 Qb2 Rf6 38 Nc3 Ne4 39 Re2 Rg6**



With the threat of 40 ... Nxc3 41 Qxc3 (41 Rxc3 Qe7) 41 ... Qe7 42 Rb2 (42 Rb1 Bxf4) 42 ... Qe4 43 Rcc2 (43 Qd2 e3!) 43 ... Rg3 44 Re2 Bxf4.

40 Rd1?!

Returning the exchange, but, in the words of Staunton ‘it is extremely difficult for White to determine what line of play is best here.’

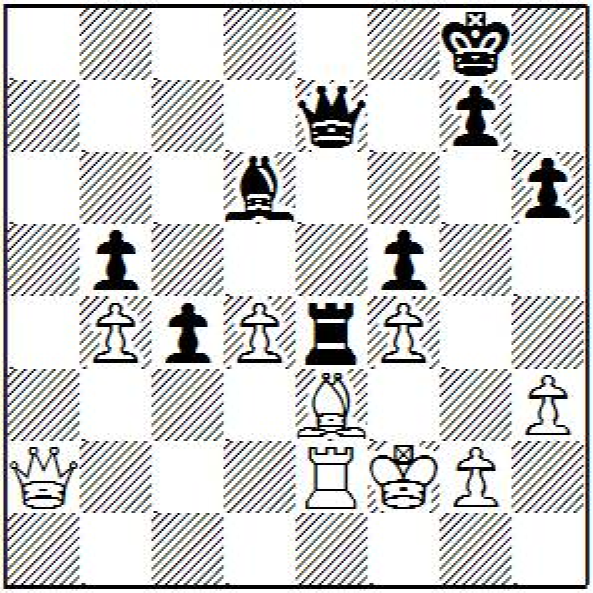
40 ... Nxc3 41 Qxc3 Bf3

The recommendation 41 ... Qe7?! (intending ... Qe4) is not very successful on account of 42 d5! Bxb4 43 Qb2 with unnecessary complications.

42 Rde1

‘The other rook should have been played,’ Saint-Amant asserted in *Le Palamède*. But Staunton refuted him in the *Chess Player’s Chronicle* by 42 ... Bxd1 43 Rxd1 Qe7 (43 ... Rg3 is also possible) 44 Rb1 Rxg2+ 45 Kxg2 Qe4+ or immediately 44 ... Qe4 45 Rb2 Bxb4, and ‘in every case Black’s game is won.’

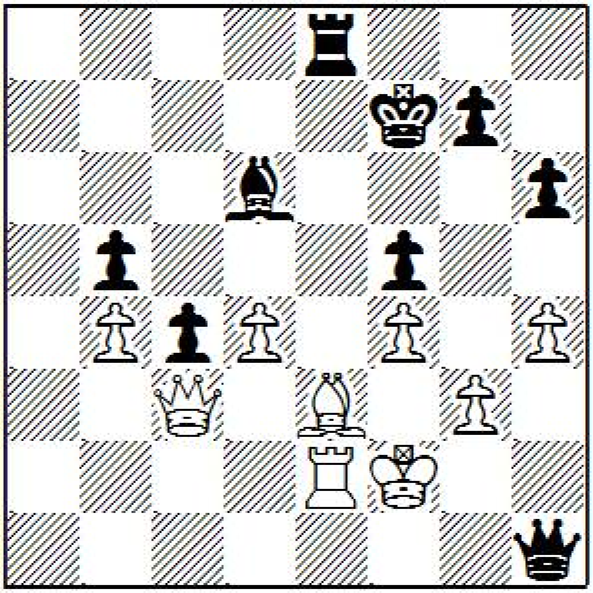
42 ... Bxe2 43 Rxe2 Qe7 44 Qb2 Re6 45 Kf2 Re4 46 Qa2



46 ... Kf7?! (missing the simple 46 ... Bxf4 winning; 46 ... Kh7 is also good) **47 g3**

White is forced to open a way into his position for the black queen.

47 ... Qb7 (47 ... g5!?) **48 Qa3 Re8 49 Qc3?!** (49 Re1 was more tenacious) **49 ... Qh1 50 h4**



50 ... g5! 51 Qe1 Qh2+ 52 Kf1 Qh3+ 53 Kg1 Qg4! 54 hxg5

Here it was already turned midnight, and the game was adjourned until the following day. In a hopeless position Saint-Amant fought on to the last bullet.

54 ... Bxf4 55 Bxf4 Qxe2 56 Qxe2 Rxe2 57 gxh6 c3 58 Kf1 Re4 59 Bc1 Kg6 60 d5 c2 61 Bd2 Rxb4 62 d6 Rd4 63 Ke2 Rxd6 64 Ke3 Kxh6 65 Ke2+ Kg6 66 Ke1 b4 0-1

The game lasted 14 hours!

Staunton won the ‘match of his life’ (+11 -6 =4), gaining a certain revenge for McDonnell’s defeat. The winner endured both the pressure of the fanatical Parisian enthusiasts, and the tiring waiting for his opponent’s replies (Saint-Amant thought endlessly over every move, and the average length of the games reached nine hours).

Yes, this unhurried match differed strikingly from the fierce encounters between La Bourdonnais and McDonnell! Staunton played cautiously, intuitively trying to grasp the principles of positional play (which, with the exception of a few rules by Philidor, had not yet been recorded and formulated). Every now and then the closed and semi-open games were tried, allowing the quiet development of the pieces. Saint-Amant acted in the same solid, rather dry manner, but not so successfully ... An interesting evaluation was given by Lionel Kieseritzky, one of the most original masters of those times: ‘Staunton plays strictly correctly for development, understands the position deeply, is composed and quickly orientates himself. But Saint-Amant has not achieved the strength of La Bourdonnais and Deschapelles; both adversaries played one and the same openings ... events developed slowly.’

And nevertheless this match became the next, after Philidor, significant step in the development of chess strategy, the understanding of the deep regularities of the game and the art of manoeuvring. 43 years later, at a higher level, this line would be continued by the Steinitz-Zukertort match ...

In 1846 Staunton declined a challenge by Kieseritzky, but on the other hand he convincingly won matches to the best of 21 decisive games against the well-known masters Bernhardt Horwitz (+14 -7 =3) and Daniel Harrwitz (+12 -9 =1; in 15 of these games Staunton gave the odds of a pawn), thus reinforcing – with the help also of his newly-invented gambit 1 d4 f5 2 e4!? – his reputation as the number one player in the world.

Despite this, Staunton was not properly recognised by either his contemporaries, or chess historians. But in 1964 Fischer included him in his ten best masters of all time, declaring:

‘Staunton was the most profound opening analyst of all time. He was more theorist than player, but nonetheless he was the strongest player of his day. Playing over his games, I discover that they are completely modern; where Morphy and Steinitz rejected the fianchetto, Staunton embraced it. In addition, he understood all of the positional concepts which modern players hold so dear, and thus – with Steinitz – must be considered the first modern player.’

Genius of Combinations

The development of international links in the mid-19th century was immediately reflected in chess too. The indefatigable Staunton, who had long dreamed of organising a tournament of the leading players in the world, decided to make use of a convenient occasion – the Great Industrial Exhibition in London (right from the moment that Prince Albert proposed it in 1849). Having enlisted the support of the St George’s Chess Club, he set up an organising committee and sent out invitations over the whole of Europe (at that time America was not yet very conspicuous).

Among those invited were the strongest masters of all the countries: Saint-Amant and Kieseritzky (France), Löwenthal and Szén (Hungary), Petroff, Jaenisch and Schumoff (Russia), and Lasa, Horwitz and Mayet (Germany). And although for various reasons Saint-Amant was unable to participate, nor the Russian players, nor the German ‘No.1’ Lasa (by a decision of the Berlin Chess Society, he was replaced by the comparatively little-known Anderssen), this hardly minimises the importance of the first international tournament in the history of chess.

Apparently, with the aim of economising, they played not by the usual all-play-all system, but a knockout (which is employed nowadays in the FIDE championships): the 16 players were divided into eight pairs, who met in mini-matches of the first to win two games (draws not counting). The losers were knocked out, and the winners continued the battle in mini-matches of now the first to win four games – the number of games was increased at the demand of the players! In the very first match the random draw brought together two of the potential favourites – Anderssen and

Kieseritzky. And although the German maestro won (+2 =1), in a series of friendly games over the following days Kieseritzky came out on top (+9 -5 =2).

However, it was one of these friendly games that eclipsed all of Anderssen's London victories, and charmed the chess world. Kieseritzky promptly sent the score of it by telegraph to his magazine *La Régence*, Kling and Horwitz published it in the first issue of their new magazine *The Chess Player*, and in the magazine *Wiener Schachzeitung* (1855) Falkbeer published a detailed analysis of this game and christened it 'immortal'.

Game 3

A.Anderssen-L.Kieseritzky

Friendly game, London 1851

King's Gambit C33

1 e4 e5 2 f4

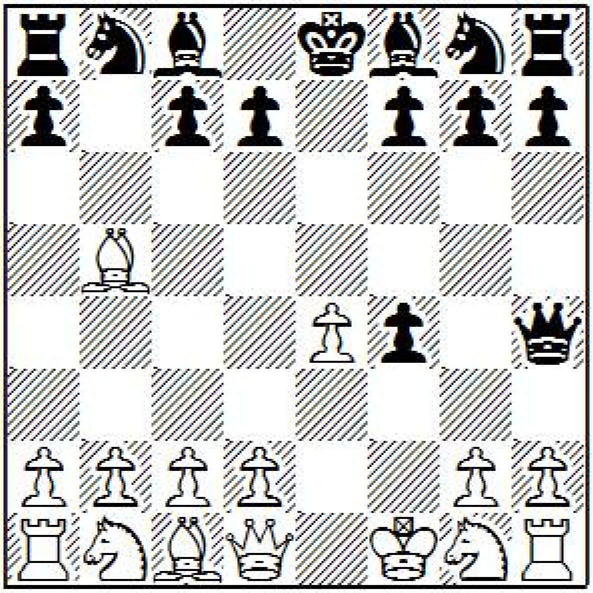
The King's Gambit was the most popular opening of that era: the initiative at any price! The sacrifice of material at an early stage was regarded as a sign of good taste, and to refuse it was considered bad form.

2 ... exf4 3 Bc4 Qh4+ 4 Kf1 b5?

Kieseritzky's favourite move, diverting the bishop away from the f7-square, but this counter-gambit is bad!

5 Bxb5

When I was forced to play Black in this position, in a thematic exhibition game with Short (London 1993), I thought for some 10-15 minutes and wanted to resign immediately. I simply did not understand: for what has the pawn been given up?



5 ... Nf6 6 Nf3 Qh6

6 ... Qh5 7 Nc3 Bb7 8 Bc4 or 8 e5 favours White.

7 d3

More energetic is 7 Nc3!, as Short in fact played against me. After 7 ... g5 (7 ... Bb7 8 Qe2 or 8 d4!? Nxe4 9 Qe2) 8 d4 Bb7 (the antediluvian game Rafael-Morphy, New York 1857, went 8 ... Bg7 9 e5 – 9 h4!? – 9 ... Nh5, and here 10 Ne4! g4 11 Nh4 would have been strong) 9 h4 Rg8 10 Kg1 gxh4 11 Rxh4 Qg6 12 Qe2 Nxe4 13 Rxf4 f5 14 Nh4 Qg3 15 Nxe4 Black finally resigned.

7 ... Nh5?!

Better was 7 ... Bc5 8 d4 Bb6 9 Nc3 Bb7 10 Bd3 (Anderssen-Pollmächer, Leipzig 1852; 10 e5 Ng4!?) 10 ... g5! 11 h4 Rg8. ‘Kieseritzky bases his play on tactical threats, which Anderssen skilfully parries.’ (Neishtadt)

8 Nh4?!

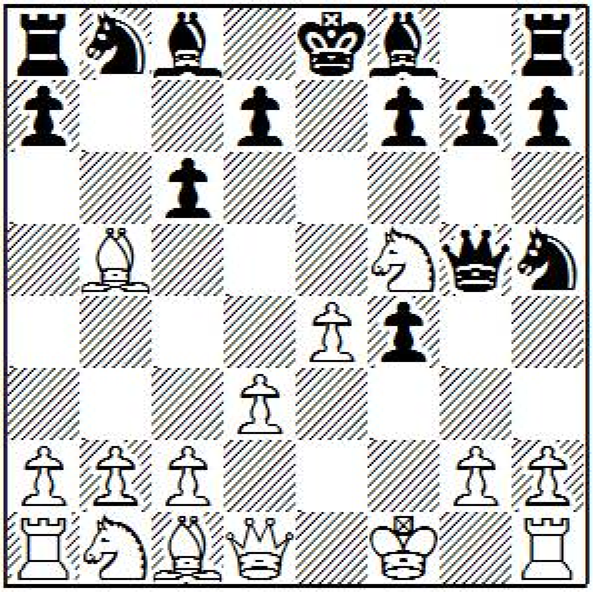
Defending against ... Ng3+, but much more ‘clever’ was 8 Rg1! with the threat of 9 g4, and if 8 ... Qb6, then 9 Nc3 c6 10 Bc4 with an overwhelming advantage.

8 ... Qg5

Kieseritzky recommended 8 ... g6, but after 9 g3! Be7 10 Qg4 c6 (or 10 ... Kd8 11 Ng2 d6 12 Qf3) 11 Bc4 Black is a long way from equalising.

9 Nf5 c6?!

But here 9 ... g6 should have been played, not fearing 10 h4 in view of 10 ... Qf6 11 Nc3 c6 12 Ba4 (12 Bc4? d5) 12 ... Na6! 13 d4 Ng3+ 14 Nxg3 fxg3+ 15 Qf3 Qxd4 16 Bb3 f6 with an unclear game, but not 10 ... Ng3+? 11 Nxg3 Qxb5 (11 ... Qxg3? 12 Rh3) 12 Nc3 Qe5 13 Nge2 Bh6 14 g3 f3 15 Nf4 with a won game.



10 g4?

Another mistake. Of course, the simple 10 Ba4 was better, with an obvious advantage after both 10 ... d5 11 g4! dxe4 12 dxe4 Ba6+ 13 Kg2 Nf6 14 Qf3 and 10 ... g6 11 Ng3 Nxg3+ 12 hxg3 Qxg3 13 Nc3 Bc5 14 Qe1! Qxe1+ (14 ... Qg4? 15 Rh4) 15 Kxe1 g5 16 Rh5 Be7 17 g3! (Hübner).

10 ... Nf6

Also to be considered was 10 ... g6!? 11 Nd4 (11 gxh5 gxf5 12 h4 Qf6 13 Bc4 fxe4 14 dxe4 Rg8 is worse for White) 11 ... Bg7 12 c3 Bxd4 13 cxd4 cxb5 (13 ... Qxb5 14 Nc3 Qb6 15 gxh5 Qxd4 16 Bxf4 Qf6?! 17 Qg4 is less clear) 14 gxh5 Nc6 15 Nc3 d6 16 Qf3 Nxd4 17 h4! Qe5 18 Qxf4 Be6, and it is now White who has to fight for equality

11 Rg1!

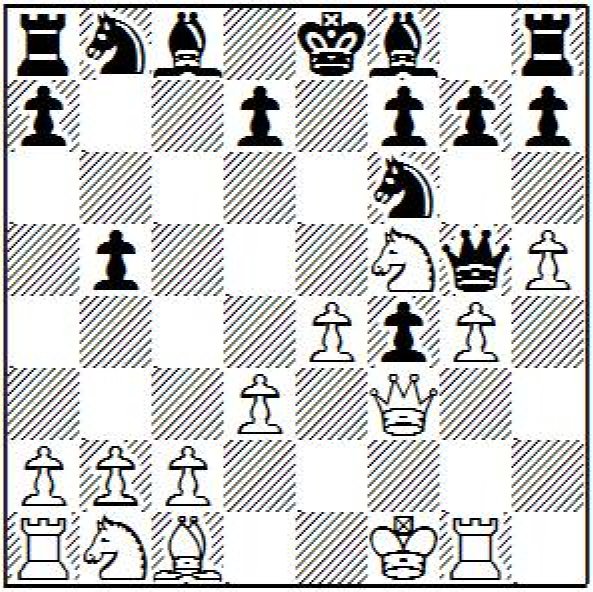
A pretty and intuitive bishop sacrifice.

11 ... cxb5?

After this Black has an objectively bad position. Unclear is 11 ... d5 12 h4 Qg6 13 h5 (less good is 13 Bxf4?! h5! 14 gxh5 Qxh5 15 Qxh5 Rxh5 16 Bxb8 cxb5) 13 ... Qg5 14 Qf3 Bxf5 15 exf5 cxb5 16 Bxf4 Qh4 17 Nc3 Nc6! 18 g5 Qxh5 19 Qe3+ Kd7 20 gxf6 Re8 21 Qf2 gxf6 22 Qg2 Qxf5 23 Qxd5+ Qxd5 24 Nxd5, but the strongest is evidently 11 ... h5!? 12 h4 Qg6 13 g5 Ng4. Now 14 Nc3 (14 Bxf4 d5!) 14 ... cxb5 15 Nd5 Na6 (15 ... d6!? 16 Nd4 Na6 17 Nxf4 Qh7) 16 Bxf4 Bb7 17 c4 Bxd5 18 cxd5 Qb6 is advantageous to Black, and so there only remains 14 Ba4 d5 15 Qe1! dxe4 16 Qxe4+ Kd8 17 Nd4 with a sharp game.

12 h4! (but not 12 Qf3 h5! etc.) **12 ... Qg6 13 h5 Qg5 14 Qf3**

Threatening the simple Bxf4.



14 ... Ng8

As Euwe states, ‘Black is too concerned about retaining his material advantage.’ However, 14 ... Nxg4 15 Rxg4 Qxh5 16 Bxf4 would also have left him little hope of saving the game: 16 ... g6 17 Nd6+ Bxd6 18 Bxd6 Nc6 19 Qf6 Rg8 20 Nc3 or 16 ... d5 17 Nc3 Bxf5 (17 ... g6? 18 Nxd5) 18 exf5 etc.

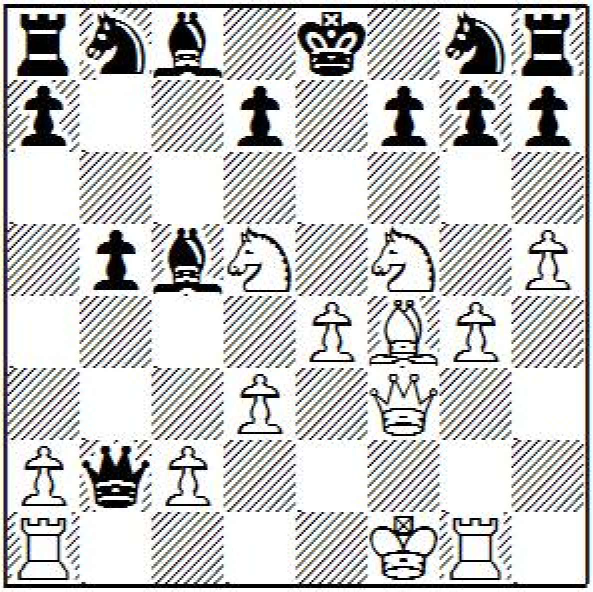
15 Bxf4 Qf6

The alternative 15 ... Qd8 16 Nc3 was equally bad.

16 Nc3 Bc5?

An immediately losing move. If 16 ... Bb7 there is a choice between 17 Nxb5 Qxb2 18 Nc7+ Kd8 19 Kg2 and 17 Qg3 Na6 (17 ... Nc6 18 g5 and Nxb5) 18 Nxb5 Qxb2 19 Nfd6+ Bxd6 20 Nxd6+ Kf8 21 Be5 Qb6 22 Kg2 f6 23 g5! Things are also not easy for Black after 16 ... Na6 17 g5 Qc6 18 Be5 or 17 Nxb5 Qxb2 18 Nbd6+ Bxd6 19 Nxd6+ Ke7 20 Re1 Qxa2 21 e5.

17 Nd5 (17 d4! and only then Nd5 was much simpler) **17 ... Qxb2**



18 Bd6?!

'The start of a brilliant combination, the correctness of which, however, is dubious' (Euwe). With this move White throws away an easy win (and perhaps the win altogether!):

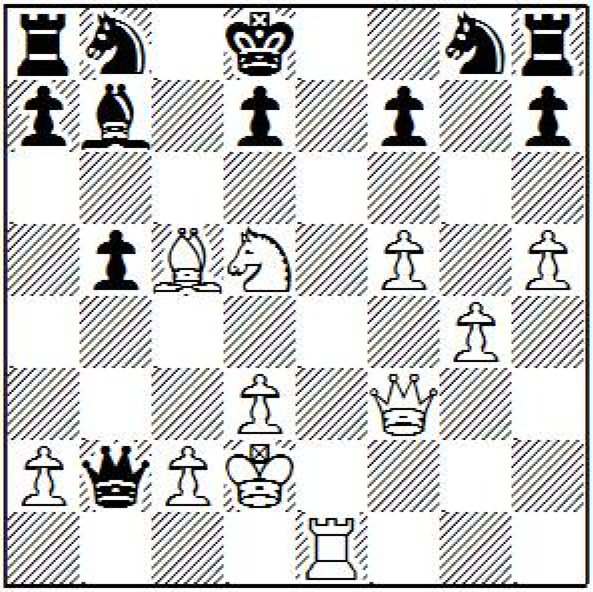
18 d4 (18 Be3!? and 18 Re1!? have also been suggested) 18 ... Qxa1+ (18 ... Bf8 19 Nc7+ Kd8 20 Re1 and wins) 19 Kg2 Qb2 20 dxc5 Na6 21 Nd6+ Kf8 22 Be5 Qxc2+ 23 Kh3 f6 24 Nxf6 wins for White.

18 ... Bxg1?

As was shown by Steinitz, 18 ... Qxa1+ 19 Ke2 Qb2! was essential. After 20 Kd2! (less good is 20 Rc1 Bb7 21 Bxc5 Bxd5 22 Qe3 Be6 23 Bd4 Qa3 24 Nxg7+ Kd8 25 Nxe6+ dxe6 26 Bxh8 Nd7) 20 ... Bxg1! 21 e5 Ba6 White's attack, in my view, is sufficient only for a draw: 22 Nxg7+ Kd8 23 Qxf7 Kc8 24 Qe8+ Kb7 25 Qd8 Kc6 26 Nb4+ Qxb4+ 27 Bxb4 Bb7 28 Qf8 Kb6 29 Qd8+ Kc6 or 22 Nc7+ Kd8 23 Qxa8 (23 Nxa6 Bb6 24 Qxa8 Ba5+ 25 Ke3 Qc1+ 26 Kf2 Qxc2+ 27 Kf1 Qc1+ 28 Kf2 Bb6+ 29 d4 also leads to a draw) 23 ... Bb6 24 Qxb8+ Bc8 25 Nd5 Ba5+ 26 Ke3 Qxc2 (26 ... Qc1+ is also possible) 27 Qxa7 Qc1+ 28 Kf2 Qd2+ 29 Kg3 Qe1+ 30 Kg2.

But apart from 21 ... Ba6 there is also an interesting try for an advantage – 21 ... Bb7!? For example: 22 Nxg7+ (22 Nc7+?! Kd8 23 Qxb7 Bb6 24 Nxa8 Ba5+ 25 Ke3 Qc1+ 26 Kf2 Qxc2+ 27 Kg1 Qc1+ 28 Kh2 Qc8 wins for Black) 22 ... Kd8 23 Qxf7 Be3+! 24 Nxe3 Ne7 25 Qxe7+ Kc8 26 Qf6 (26 e6!? Bc6 27 Qf7 Na6 28 e7 Kb7 29 e8Q Raxe8 30 Nxe8 is also unclear) 26 ... Qxa2 27 Ngf5 Qa5+! 28 Ke2 Re8 29 Be7 Na6 30 Nd6+ Kc7 31 Nxb7! Kxb7 32 Qf3+ Kb8 33 Bd6+ Nc7 34 Nd5, and White's counterplay is nevertheless sufficient for a draw: 34 ... Rc8 35 Nf6 Rd8 36 Nd5 Rc8 with a repetition.

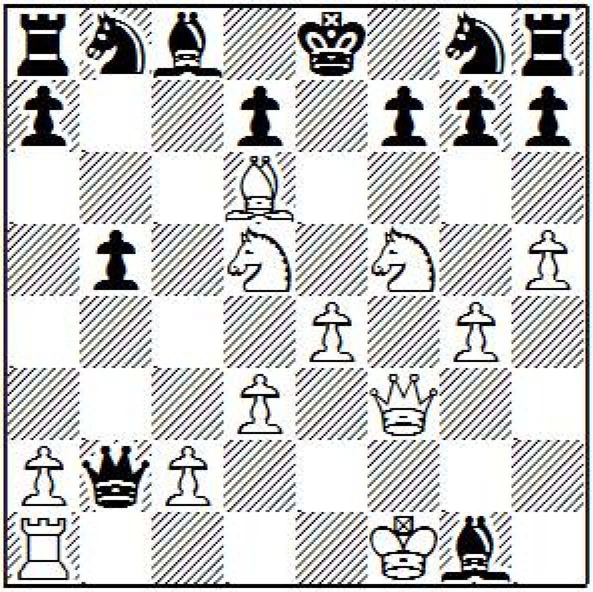
I should add that 20 ... g6? (instead of 20 ... Bxg1!) will not do, but not because of the generally-accepted variation 21 Rb1? gxf5! 22 Rxb2 Bxd6 23 e5 Bxe5 24 Qe3 'with advantage to White' (after 24 ... Nc6! 25 d4 Nge7 he has to beat a retreat), but in view of the very pretty 21 Re1! Bb7 22 Bxc5 gxf5 (after 22 ... Bxd5 23 exd5+ Kd8 both 24 Nd6 Nh6 25 Qe3 Na6 26 a3! and 24 Bd4 Qb4+ 25 Bc3 Qc5 26 Ba5+ Kc8 27 d4 are good for White) 23 exf5+ Kd8.



Analysis diagram

24 Bb6+!! axb6 25 Qe3! A wonderful 'quiet' move! Black does not have a single check, and if 25 ... Bxd5 there follows 26 Qxb6+ and Re8

mate. For a human it is very hard to perceive such a mate: to see the move Bb6+!! from afar is impossible. Whereas a computer finds such sacrifices almost instantly ... Incidentally, a similar bishop sacrifice appears in one of the variations from the game Tal-Portisch (Bled 2nd matchgame 1965), which is analysed in the second volume. However, let us return to the 19th century.

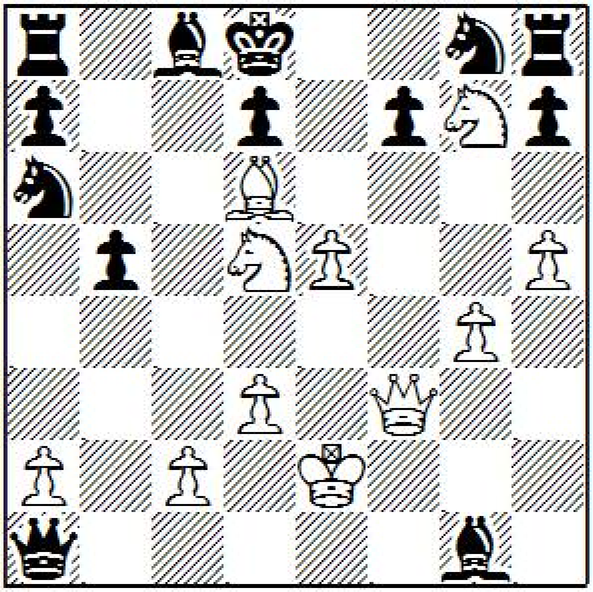


19 e5!

Also a ‘quiet’ move, with the elementary threat of 20 Nxg7+ Kd8 21 Bc7 mate.

19 ... Qxa1+ 20 Ke2

Here Black resigned. Black loses after 20 ... Bb7 21 Nxg7+ Kd8 22 Qxf7 Nh6 23 Ne6+ or 20 ... f6 21 Nxg7+ Kf7 22 Nxf6 etc. Steinitz looked for a way to save the game with 20 ... Ba6 21 Nc7+ Kd8 22 Nxa6! (Falkbeer), but analysis by Chigorin proved clear cut: 22 ... Qc3 23 Bc7+ Qxc7 24 Nxc7 Kxc7 25 Qxa8 Nc6 (25 ... Bc5 26 Nd6 Bxd6 27 exd6+ Kc8 28 Qxa7) 26 Nd6 Nxe5 27 Nxb5+ Kb6 28 Qb8+ Kc6 29 c4; 22 ... Bb6 23 Qxa8 Qc3 24 Qxb8+ Qc8 25 Qxc8+ Kxc8 26 Bf8 h6 27 Nd6+ Kd8 28 Nxf7+ Ke8 29 Nxh8 Kxf8 30 Kf3; 22 ... Qxa2 23 Bc7+ Ke8 24 Nb4 Nc6 25 Nxa2 Bc5 26 Bd6. However, the game is rightly famous for 20 ... Na6 21 Ng7+ Kd8



Analysis diagram

22 Qf6+!! (a spectacular concluding sacrifice) 22 ... Nxf6 23 Be7 mate!

Objectively the game is rather weak and superficial, but what a finish! After sacrificing both rooks, a bishop and a queen, the mate was simultaneously pure, economic and smooth! ‘An unusually elegant finish, almost forcing the incorrectness of the entire combination to be forgotten.’ (Euwe) Later the combination with the sacrifice of both rooks on their initial squares was to occur many times, including games by Steinitz, Alekhine and Tal ...

Let us return, however, to the London knockout tournament. In the quarter-final Anderssen overcame Szén (+4 -2), after losing the first two games to him – if the initial rules had been retained (the first to win two games), chess history would have turned out differently ... Then the random draw played a cruel trick: in the semi-final Anderssen met the chief favourite Staunton and, to the horror of the English fans, inflicted on him an unconditional defeat (+4 -1). With this the tournament intrigue was exhausted: in the final Anderssen tore to pieces the local ‘tourist’ Wyvill (+4 -2 =1) and won the first prize.

Staunton was in a state of shock: his reputation as the best player in the world had suffered a severe blow. However, as the organiser of the tournament he had sensed the trickiness of the knockout system, and even before the start he had found a way of insuring himself: in the rules it was written that the winner was obliged to accept a challenge from any participant. A kind of right to a return match! And Staunton promptly challenged the offender to a match (it was suggested that they should play to the best of 21 decisive games). But ... he fell ill, Anderssen's holiday came to an end, and he had to return home. Alas, this battle of titans never in fact took place ...

The new uncrowned king of chess Adolf Anderssen (6 July 1818 – 13 March 1879) was born into a poor family in Breslau (now Wroclaw), where he graduated from the university and lived almost continuously all his life, teaching mathematics and German in a secondary school. He made the acquaintance of chess at the age of nine and learned from the books of Philidor, Moses Hirschel (a populariser of the works by Greco and Stamma) and the Viennese player Johann Allgaier, the author of the best chess manual in the German language, permeated with the spirit of the Italian School. He was attracted by composition and he published a collection *Aufgaben für Schachspieler* (1842 and 1852).

Back in the mid-1840s he had played at an amateur level, being inferior to Lasa, Bledow, Mayet and Löwenthal ... But he made staggering progress by studying the works of the Modenese School, Lewis and Walker, and by analysing the games of the old masters, especially the La Bourdonnais-McDonnell encounters. On flying visits to Berlin he met strong opponents there, impressed with his magical combinations, and soon was deemed a rising star.

After London 1851 his compatriots arranged for Anderssen a genuine coronation! But he still had to demonstrate that his London triumph was not a fluke. There were then extremely few tournaments, and he had to demonstrate this more with creative, rather than competitive achievements.

The following game literally bewitched his contemporaries, who called it, following the example of Steinitz, 'an evergreen in the laurel wreath of great German masters.' Chigorin too, as well as many others, considered it to be one of the most brilliant games ever played.

Game 4

A.Anderssen-J.Dufresne

Berlin 1852
Evans Gambit C52

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4!? (also the height of fashion at that time) **4 ... Bxb4**

As Capablanca said, the way to refute a gambit is to accept it! After 4 ... Bb6 5 a4 White simply has more space: 5 ... a5 (5 ... a6 is sounder) 6 b5 Nd4 7 Nxd4 Bxd4 8 c3 Bb6 9 d4 exd4 10 0-0! (10 cxd4 d5!) 10 ... Ne7 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 cxd4, and Black was unable to equalise in Kasparov-Piket, Amsterdam 1995.

5 c3 Ba5

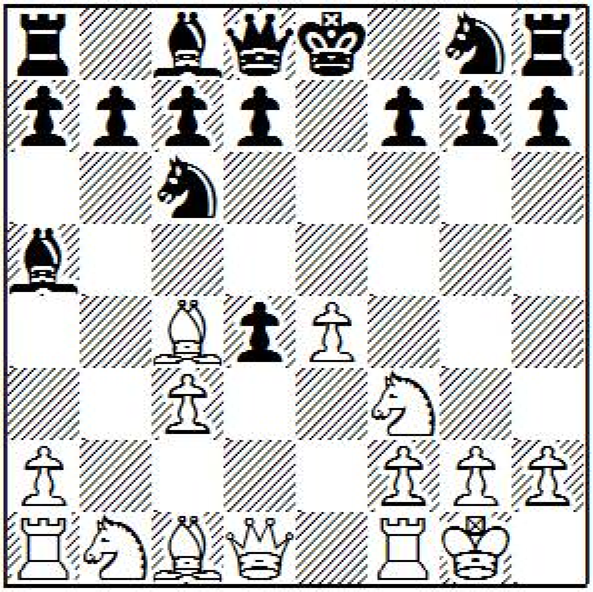
The classical defensive line. I should mention that Jean Dufresne was a pupil of Anderssen and quite a competent master, the author of some popular chess manuals.

Nowadays 5 ... Be7 6 d4 Na5 is also in vogue, for example: 7 Be2!? (7 Nxe5 Nxc4 8 Nxc4 d5 9 exd5 Qxd5 10 Ne3 is much more tedious) 7 ... exd4 8 Qxd4! Nf6 (8 ... Nc6!? 9 Qxg7 Bf6 10 Qg3 d6 is unclear) 9 e5 Nc6 10 Qh4 Nd5 11 Qg3 g6 (11 ... 0-0 12 Bh6; 11 ... Kf8!?) 12 0-0 Nb6 13 c4 d6 14 Rd1 Nd7 15 Bh6! with a powerful initiative for the pawn and a win on the 25th move (Kasparov-Anand, Riga 1995). Incidentally, reverting to old gambits has caught many present-day players unawares, but here the dispute did not last long: everywhere an acceptable defence was found for Black.

6 d4! (if 6 0-0, then 6 ... d6 7 d4 Bb6! is strong, Chigorin-Lasker, St Petersburg 1895/96 – *Game No.43*) **6 ... exd4**

In the 20th century 6 ... d6 7 Qb3!? Qd7 8 dxe5 Bb6! was tried, with an unclear game.

7 0-0



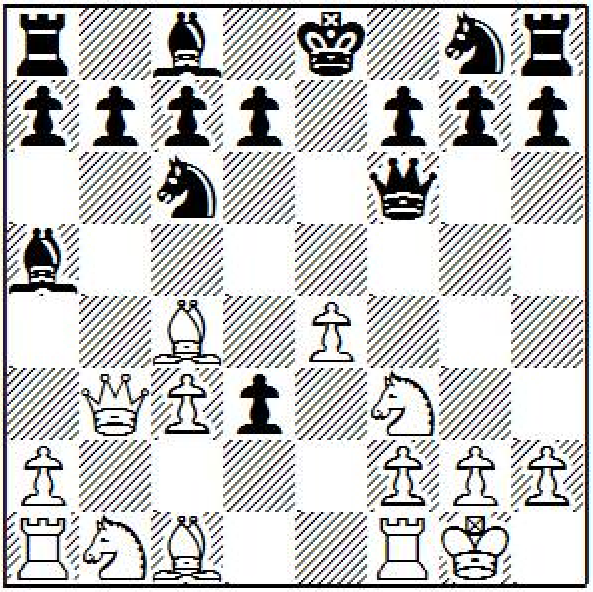
7 ... d3?!

Also insufficient is 7 ... dxc3?! 8 Qb3 Qf6 9 e5 Qg6 10 Nxc3 Nge7 (Anderssen-Dufresne, Berlin 1851), since after 11 Ba3! Black’s position is highly unpleasant. The correct course – 7 ... Nge7! and 8 ... d5! – extended across the century from the Anderssen-Mieses match (Breslau 1867) to the games Short-Adams (Sarajevo 2000) and Morozevich-Adams (Wijk aan Zee 2001).

8 Qb3!

A surprise: Dufresne was probably expecting 8 Ng5?! Nh6 9 e5, as Anderssen played in the matches with him and Mayet (Berlin 1851).

8 ... Qf6



9 e5

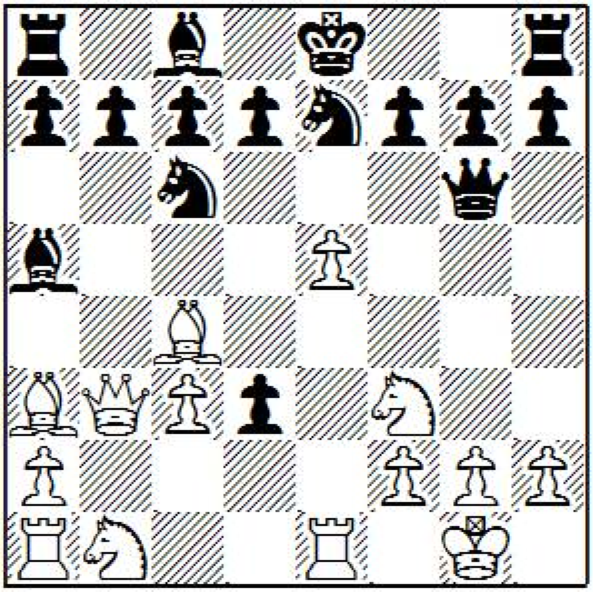
It is curious that in their 1855 match Dufresne was not afraid to go in for this position against Anderssen, but the latter persistently replied 9 Re1!? with the idea of 9 ... Nge7 10 Bg5 Qg6 11 Bxe7 Kxe7 12 e5. Whereas Zukertort in his first match with Steinitz (London 11th matchgame 1872) was tempted by the unfavourable 9 Bg5?! Qg6 10 Bxd3 Nh6 11 Nbd2 0-0 12 Rad1 Bb6 13 Bxh6 Qxh6 14 e5 d5! 15 exd6 cxd6 etc.

9 ... Qg6 10 Re1 Nge7

Or 10 ... Bb6 11 Qd1! Nh6 12 Bxd3 Qh5 13 h3 with a strong initiative (Anderssen-Dufresne, Berlin 1855).

11 Ba3

But not 11 Nbd2? b5! 12 Bxb5 Rb8 13 Qa4 Bxc3 14 Rb1 a6 15 Bxc6 Qxc6 16 Qxc6 Nxc6 17 Rxb8 Nxb8 with a won endgame for Black in Zukertort-Steinitz, London 9th matchgame 1872).



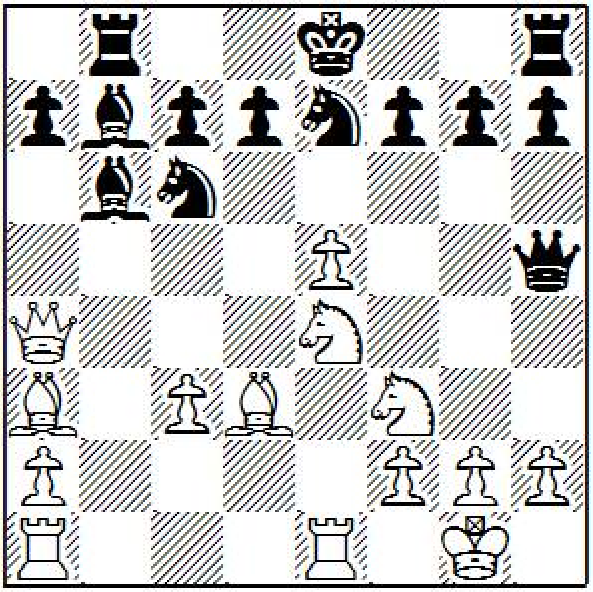
11 ... b5?!

‘Black wants to develop his queenside, but 11 ... 0-0 was better.’ (Euwe) However, here too after 12 Nbd2 Bb6 13 Qb1 and Bxd3 White has a splendid attacking position.

12 Qxb5 Rb8 13 Qa4 Bb6 (13 ... 0-0? 14 Bxe7) **14 Nbd2 Bb7?!**

Also after 13 ... 0-0 14 Ne4 Black’s position is unenviable.

15 Ne4 Qf5? (as Lasker pointed out, 15 ... d2! 16 Nexd2 0-0 was now simply essential) **16 Bxd3 Qh5**



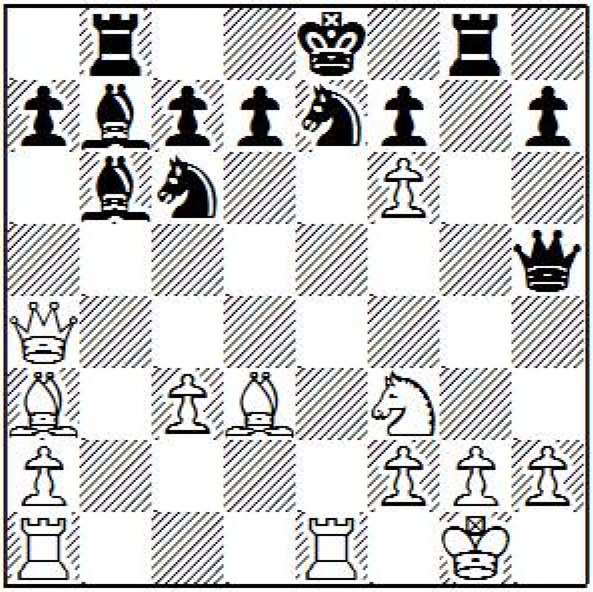
White has an enormous advantage. The time has come for resolute action, and Anderssen played in accordance with his romantic style and the demands of his time:

17 Nf6+?!!

The two exclamation marks are for one of the most beautiful combinations in the history of chess. And the question mark is for the unnecessary complications: the prosaic 17 Ng3 Qh6 18 Bc1 Qe6 19 Bc4 Nd5 (19 ... Qg6 20 Nh4 Qg4 21 Bxf7+) 20 Ng5 Nxc3 (20 ... Qg4 21 Re4) 21 Qb3 would have concluded the game without any problems. But ... the treasury of chess art would have lost a major masterpiece!

17 ... gxf6 18 exf6 Rg8!

Black’s last chance is a counterattack along the newly-opened g-file.



19 Rad1!?

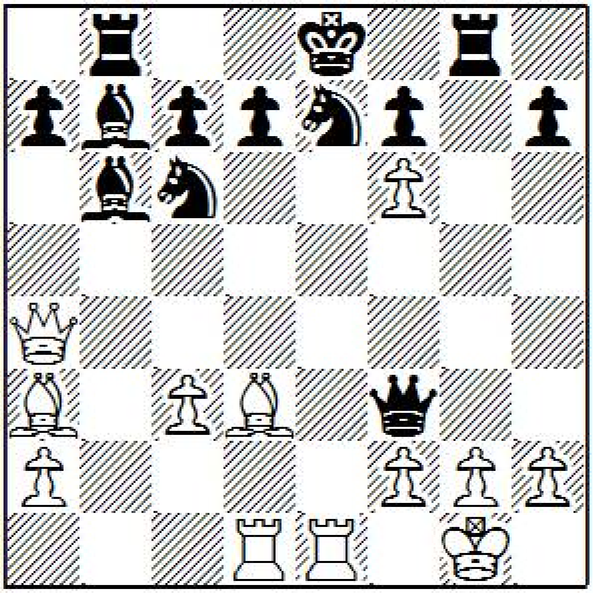
‘This is the greatly admired introduction to astounding sacrifices. Yet it cannot sustain criticism ... White can win with 19 Be4 because his attack is irresistible, whereas Black’s counterattack is then frustrated. For instance, 19 ... Qh3 20 g3 Rxg3+ 21 hxg3 Qxg3+ 22 Kh1 Bxf2 23 Re2 wins.’ (Lasker) However, later the knockout blow 23 ... Nd4!! was found here. Therefore I would have preferred the line 23 Bxe7! Qh3+ 24 Nh2 Bxe1 25 Rxe1 with the initiative.

19 ... Qxf3?

Lasker criticised White’s previous move because of the possible reply 19 ... Rg4!, which was analysed by the German master Paul Lipke in *Deutsche Schachzeitung* (1898). I don’t wish to tire you with all the numerous variations, which belong to more than one generation of players. I will merely point out that in 1930 Hoppe and Heckner tried to demonstrate a win for White, which at present cannot be found even by a computer. Thus, after 20 c4? Rxg2+! (instead of 20 ... Rf4? 21 Bg6! or 21 Qb5 Qh6 22 Bf5 Qxf6 23 Rxd7!) 21 Kxg2 Qg4+ 22 Kf1 Qxf3 23 Rxe7+ Nxe7 24 Qxd7+ Kxd7 25 Bf5+ Ke8 26 Bd7+ Kf8 the king hides at g8, and in the main variation 20 Bc4 Qf5 21 Rxd7 Kxd7 22 Ne5+ Kc8 23 Nxg4 Nd5 24 Qd1 instead of 24 ... Nd8? 25 Bd3! Qd7 26 Ne5 Qe6 27 Nxf7! winning, far better is 24 ... Nxf6! 25 Bd3 Qxg4 26 Qxg4+ Nxg4 27 Bf5+ Kd8 28 Rd1+

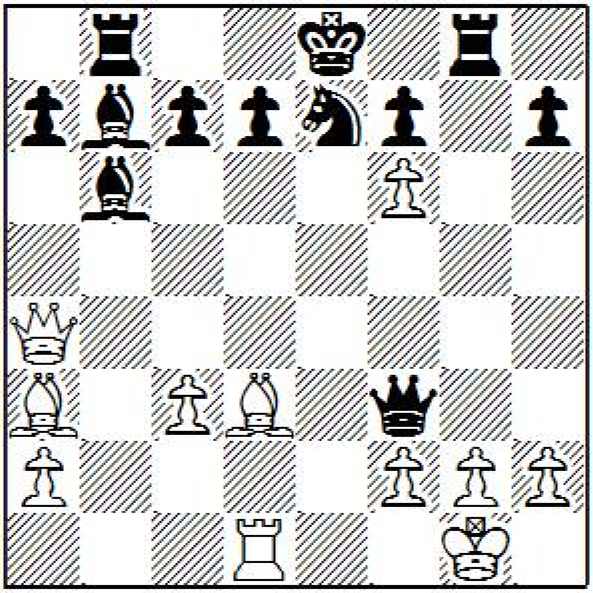
Nd4 29 Bxg4 Bd5 30 cxd4 Bxa2 with a roughly equal endgame. Also unclear is 20 Re4!? Rxe4 21 Qxe4 d6 22 Re1! Qg6! (but not 22 ... Ne5? 23 Bb5+ c6 24 Ba4! winning).

Therefore, 19 ... Rg4! would have made things much more difficult for White. However, can we really criticise Dufresne, who was tempted by a threat of mate in one move, and did not foresee the tricky idea of the combinative magician?



20 Rxe7+! Nxe7!?

To create a chess masterpiece, you really do need the generous participation of your opponent! A modern professional and, of course, a computer would without hesitation have replied 20 ... Kd8, thus avoiding an immediate rout: 21 Rxd7+! Kc8! (21 ... Kxd7 22 Bf5+ Ke8 23 Bd7+ Kd8 24 Bxc6+ and mate) 22 Rd8+! Kxd8 (22 ... Rxd8 23 gxf3 wins; 22 ... Nxd8 23 Qd7+!! – the same motif as in the game) 23 Be2+! Nd4 24 Bxf3 Bxf3 25 g3! Bxd1 26 Qxd1 c5 27 cxd4 cxd4 28 Be7+ with a tedious, but won endgame. Neishtadt’s recommendation of 23 Bf5+ Qxd1+ 24 Qxd1+ Nd4 25 g3 is less clear in view of 25 ... Rg5! 26 Bh3 Bf3!



21 Qxd7+!! Kxd7 22 Bf5+ Ke8 (or 22 ... Kc6 23 Bd7 mate) **23 Bd7+ Kf8 24 Bxe7 mate**!

‘It is noteworthy that in both these celebrated games Anderssen gives mate with a bishop on e7.’ (Euwe)

In addition to his teaching work Anderssen contributed to the magazine *Schachzeitung* (1851-1859) and *Neue Berliner Schachzeitung* (1864-1871). In seven years after 1851 he played only two(!) serious games and arrived for his highly important match with Morphy (which will be described later) in far from his best form. However, after Morphy’s departure he restored his reputation of the strongest player in the world, by winning a match against the next challenger Ignác Kolisch (1861) and then also the second major London international tournament (1862), which was held, incidentally, on the all-play-all system.

Despite the obvious difference in class of the two players, the following game also gives a clear impression of the chess fashion during Anderssen’s time.

Game 5

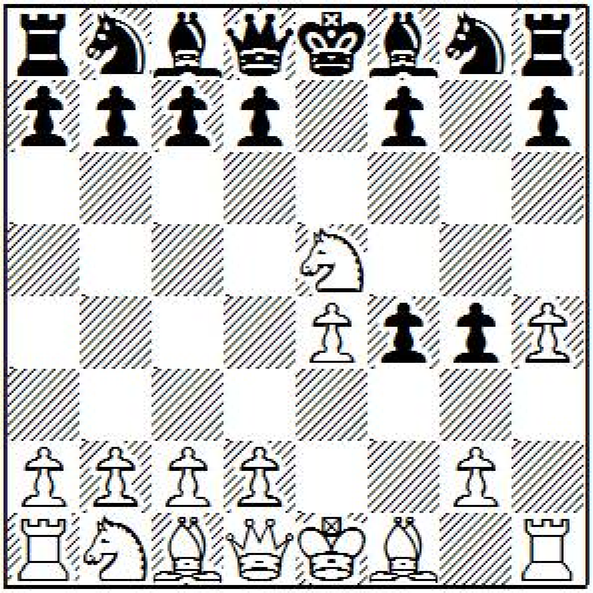
J.Rosanes-A.Anderssen

Breslau 1863

King’s Gambit C39

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3 g5 4 h4 g4 5 Ne5

The Kieseritzky Gambit was one of the theoretical *tabiyas* of the 19th century.



5 ... Nf6!

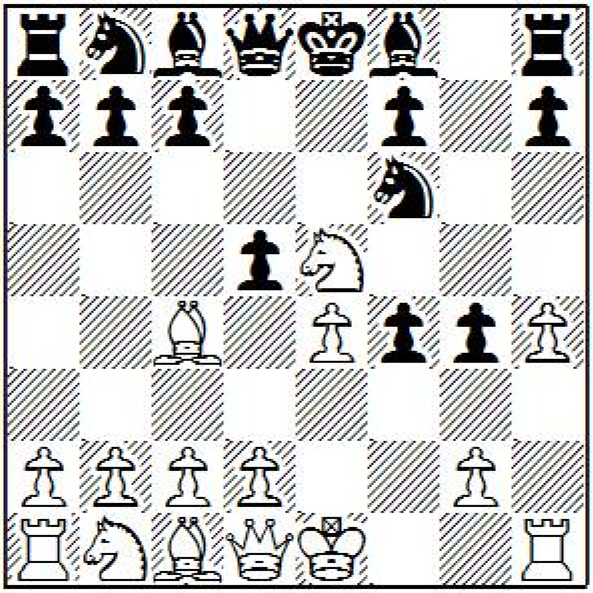
In Anderssen’s games there several times occurred 5 ... Bg7 6 Nxg4 or 6 d4, and 5 ... h5 6 Bc4 Rh7 (6 ... Nh6? 7 d4 d6 8 Nd3 f3 9 gxf3 etc.) 7 d4, and 5 ... d6!? 6 Nxg4 – this, following the example of grandmaster Fedorov, is popular even today: Black replies 6 ... Nf6 (not being tempted by the old line 6 ... Be7 7 d4 Bxh4+ 8 Nf2 Qg5), when Federov initially played 7 Nf2 Rg8 8 d4 Bh6 9 Nc3 Nc6! (9 ... Qe7 10 Nd3 Bg4 has also occurred) 10 Nd5 Nxd5 11 exd5 Ne7 12 Qe2 etc., but after 11 ... Qe7+! 12 Be2 Nb4 13 c4 Bf5! 14 Qa4+ Kf8 15 Qxb4 Re8 16 Qd2 Rxg2 17 Kf1 Rg3 18 Qd1 Be4 19 Rh2 f5 20 Nxe4 fxe4 21 Bg4 e3 22 Bf3 Qg7 23 Rh1 Rg2! with crushing threats (Federov-Shirov, Polanica Zdroj 2000), but then switched to 7 Nxf6+! Qxf6 8 Nc3 Nc6 (8 ... c6?! 9 Be2! Rg8 10 Bf3) 9 Nd5 Qg6 10 d3 Qg3+ 11 Kd2 Ne7 12 Qe1 (but not 12 Nxc7+? Kd8 13 Nxa8 Qe3+ 14 Kc3 Bg7+ 15 Kb3 Be6+) 12 ... Nxd5 13 exd5+ Be7 with equal chances in Fedorov-Anand, Wijk aan Zee 2001.

6 Bc4

6 Nxg4?! is dubious. In a series of friendly games with Morphy (Paris 1858) Anderssen first refuted 6 ... d5? – by 7 Nxf6+ Qxf6 8 Qe2! Bd6 9 Nc3 c6 10 d4! Qxd4 11 Bd2 Rg8 12 exd5+ Kd8 13 0-0-0! Bg4 14 Qe4 Qxe4 15 Nxe4 Bxd1 16 Nxd6 Bh5 17 Bxf4 cxd5 18 Nxb7+ Ke7 19 Bb5!, and then he showed the correct way: 6 ... Nxe4! 7 d3 Ng3 8 Bxf4 Nxh1 9 Qe2+ Qe7 10 Nf6+ Kd8 11 Bxc7+ Kxc7 12 Nd5+ Kd8 13 Nxe7 Bxe7 14 Qg4 (14 Qh5?! Ng3!) 14 ... d6 15 Qf4 Rg8! with sufficient compensation for the queen.

However, even after the currently fashionable 6 d4 d6 (6 ... Bg7?! 7 Nc3 d6 8 Nd3 0-0 9 Nxf4 Anderssen-Zukertort, Breslau 1866) 7 Nd3 White cannot build up any particular momentum: 7 ... Nxe4 8 Bxf4 Bg7 (Spassky-Fischer, Mar del Plata 1960; 8 ... Qe7!?) 9 c3 Qe7! with sharp play, or 7 ... Nc6!? 8 c3 (8 Nc3 Nxd4 9 Nxf4 Ne6!) 8 ... Nxe4 9 Bxf4 d5 10 Nd2 Bd6 11 Ne5 0-0 (11 ... Qf6!?) 12 Nxe4 dxe4 13 Qc2 Qf6 with excellent play for Black (Fedorov-Ivanchuk, Wijk aan Zee 2001).

6 ... d5! (this is the point!)



7 exd5 Bd6 8 d4

Later the American professor and millionaire Isaac Rice devised the gambit 8 0-0 Bxe5 9 Re1 and, as a patron, did everything possible to encourage the testing of his idea in thematic events. Lasker and Chigorin even played an entire match (Brighton 1903) on the theme of 9 ... Qe7 10 c3 f3!? (10 ... Nh5 11 d4 Nd7 is even better) 11 d4 Ne4 12 Rxe4 Bh2+ 13 Kxh2 Qxe4 14 g3 0-0, and Black (Chigorin) won 3½-2½. I think that this indicates not the weakness of the world champion's play, but the defects of White's gambit ...

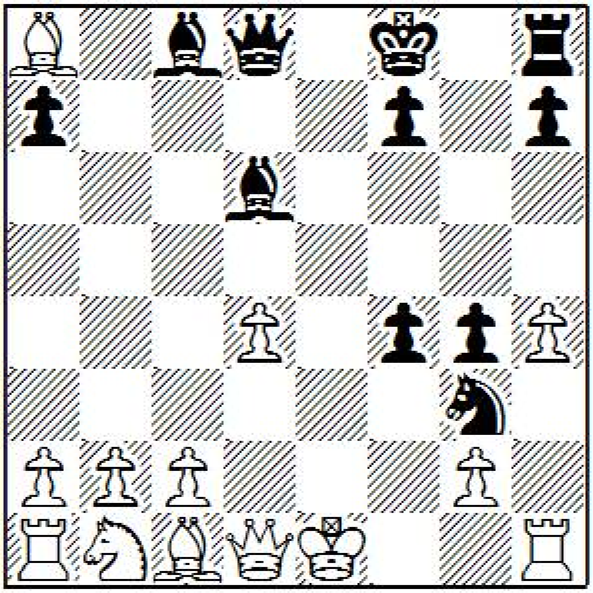
8 ... Nh5

More accurate than 8 ... Qe7?! 9 Bxf4 Nh5 10 g3! (a year earlier Anderssen tried to uphold this position as White) and probably than 8 ... 0-0 9 0-0! (but not 9 Bxf4? Nh5 10 g3 f6 11 Nd3 Nxg3! Pillsbury-Chigorin, Vienna 1903) 9 ... Nh5 10 Nxg4 Qxh4 11 Nh2 Ng3 (11 ... Re8 12 Nc3! Alapin) 12 Re1 Nd7 13 Nd2 Nf6 14 Ndf3 Qh5 15 Re5! with the initiative (Neustadtl-Pierce, correspondence 1903).

9 Bb5+?

Correct is 9 0-0! (9 Nc3 Qe7!) 9 ... Qxh4 10 Qe1. It is amusing that Rosanes copies the play of his opponent against Hirschfeld (Berlin 1860), where Black met the bishop check with 9 ... Kf8?! But Anderssen had not been idle and he had prepared an excellent sacrifice of a pawn, and then of a whole rook!

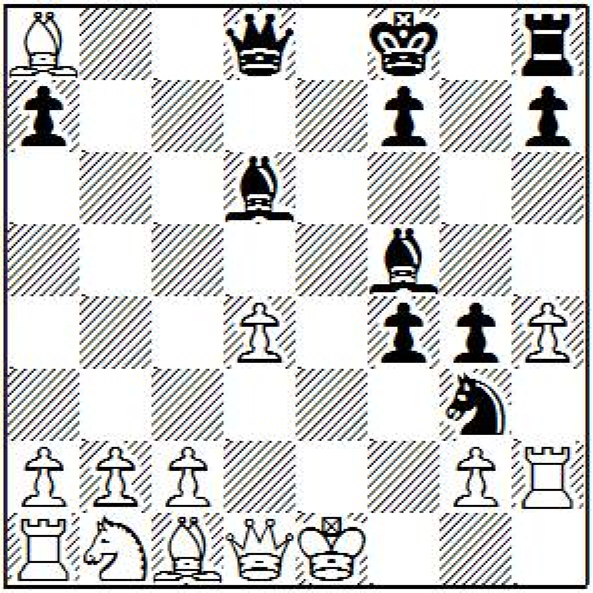
9 ... c6! 10 dxc6 bxc6! 11 Nxc6 Nxc6 12 Bxc6+ Kf8! 13 Bxa8 Ng3



14 Rh2

Rosanes (a little-known club player) holds on to the material, apparently not realising that Black has ultra-powerful compensation for the sacrificed rook. However, it is hard to offer White any good advice. For example, in the event of 14 Kf2 Nxh1+ 15 Qxh1 g3+ 16 Ke1 (16 Kg1 Bc5!; 16 Kf3 Rg8 17 Bxf4 Qf6 etc.) 16 ... Qe7+ 17 Kd1 Bg4+ 18 Bf3 Bxf3+ 19 gxf3 Rg8 20 Qg2 Qxh4 21 Ke2 Qh2 22 Kf1 h5 the advance of the h-pawn is decisive.

14 ... Bf5 (Harrwitz's suggestion of 14 ... Qe7+ 15 Kf2 Ne4+! is also good)



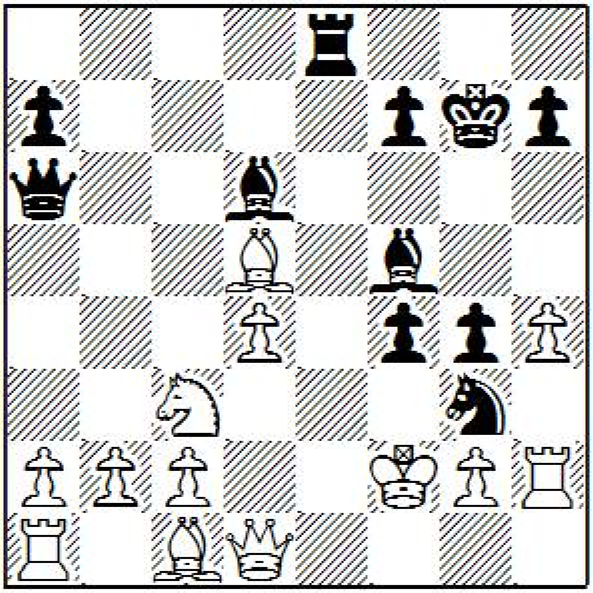
15 Bd5

After the more tenacious, in Réti's opinion, 15 Bc6 there is 15 ... Qe7+ 16 Kf2 Ne4+ 17 Bxe4 g3+ 18 Kg1 gxh2+ etc.

16 ... Kg7 (making way for the rook) **16 Nc3 Re8+ 17 Kf2 Qb6**

Many modern players would probably regard Anderssen's rook sacrifice with mistrust and caution, but meanwhile the threat of ... Be5! is already decisive.

18 Na4 Qa6 (and now the threat is 19 ... Qe2+ 20 Qxe2 Rxe2+, 21 ... Re1+ and 22 ... Rf1 mate) **19 Nc3**



Also in the event of 19 c4 Qxa4! 20 b3 (20 Qxa4 Re2+ leads to mate) 20 ... Qd7 White has no defence.

19 ... Be5!! (another 'quiet' move before the decisive combination) **20 a4?**

Intending to block the queen by 21 Nb5, but allowing a highly spectacular mate. Also clearly bad was 20 dxe5? Qb6+ 21 Ke1 Qg1+ 22 Kd2 Qe3 mate. However, even the best, computer defence 20 Kg1 would not have saved White from a rout: 20 ... Qb6 (here the 20 ... Qf1+? idea no longer works: 21 Qxf1 Bxd4+ 22 Be3!) 21 Rh1 Bxd4+ 22 Kh2 Qf6!

Here Anderssen announced mate in four: 20 ... Qf1+!! (diversion!) 21 Qxf1 Bxd4+ 22 Be3 Rxe3 (and, whatever White does, mate in one move is inevitable) 23 Kg1 Re1 mate.

Of Anderssen's other exploits, mention should be made of his fantastic match in 1866 with Steinitz (which will be described later), his win in a match against his highly talented pupil Zukertort (1868), and his first prize in the strong double-round tournament in Baden-Baden (1870), sustained by two wins against Steinitz!

Later the first world champion was to say about Anderssen: 'This was the greatest master of all times. His brilliant style, the beauty of his combinations and the depth of thought were remarkable ... '

It was for the sake of beauty that in any position he would seek drastic measures and would boldly burn his boats behind him, overstepping the safety margin. But in defence he was much weaker, asserting that ‘the best form of defence is attack!’ Such play was admired, but the progress of chess was inexorable, and the old combinative school led by Anderssen proved powerless against the modernised technique of Morphy (and then also Steinitz), which was based on a sound positional foundation.

The American Legend

Paul Charles Morphy (22 June 1837 – 10 July 1884) was born in New Orleans, in the state of Louisiana. His father came from a distinguished Creole family of Spanish and Irish extraction, while his mother was French. In Paul’s family, chess was played by all the men: his grandfather, father, elder brother and his Uncle Ernest, one of the strongest players in the town. After learning to play chess at the age of ten, already when he was twelve he inflicted a spectacular defeat on the local maestro Rousseau (this was Morphy’s first published game), and soon he also defeated Löwenthal, who was on a tour across the southern states of the USA.

Paul was a real child prodigy: he astonished his family with his memory and with his quick grasp of everything. His play was distinguished by its inventiveness, precise calculation and the methodical implementation of his plans. And most important, gradually the young Morphy became the most erudite player of his time. Fluent in French, English, Spanish and German, he read Philidor’s *L’analyse*, the Parisian magazine *La Régence*, Staunton’s *Chess Player’s Chronicle*, and possibly also Anderssen’s *Schachzeitung* (at least, he knew all of Anderssen’s published games). He studied Bilguer’s 400-page *Handbuch* – which consisted partly of opening analyses in tabular form, and also Staunton’s *Chess Player’s Handbook*. ‘These books,’ considers Fischer, ‘are better than modern ones; there has been no significant improvement since then in King Pawn openings, and Morphy’s natural talents would be more than sufficient for him to vanquish the best twentieth century players.’

(Fischer is eccentric always and in everything, including his opinions. In the 1960s the theory of the open games may indeed ‘not have advanced’ yet, but by the start of the 21st century it had undergone revolutionary changes!).

After shining at college, in two years Paul completed the entire course at Louisiana University and at the age of 19 he became a qualified lawyer. But since in the USA it was possible to work in this field only from the age of 21, for the moment he decided to devote himself entirely to his favourite game – seeing as the chess boom reigning after the first international tournament in London had also reached the New World. In the autumn of 1857 the first American Chess Congress took place, attracting the 16 best players in the country. Like the London event, it was held on the knockout system: mini-matches of the first to win three games, and in the final – five.

Morphy easily reached the final (nine wins and one draw!), where he crushed (+5 -1 =2) the as yet little-known German Louis Paulsen, who was then living in the USA. Moreover, he played quickly, as usual, whereas his opponent played very slowly, and since the time for thinking was not restricted, the games lasted 10-11 hours, and the drawn second game as long as 15 hours (out of which Paulsen thought for 12!). The most famous game of the match is the sixth.

Game 6

L.Paulsen-P.Morphy

First American Congress, New York 1857

Four Knights Game C48

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 Bc5

Much quieter is 4 ... Bb4, while the Marshall-Rubinstein move 4 ... Nd4 was still half a century away.

5 0-0

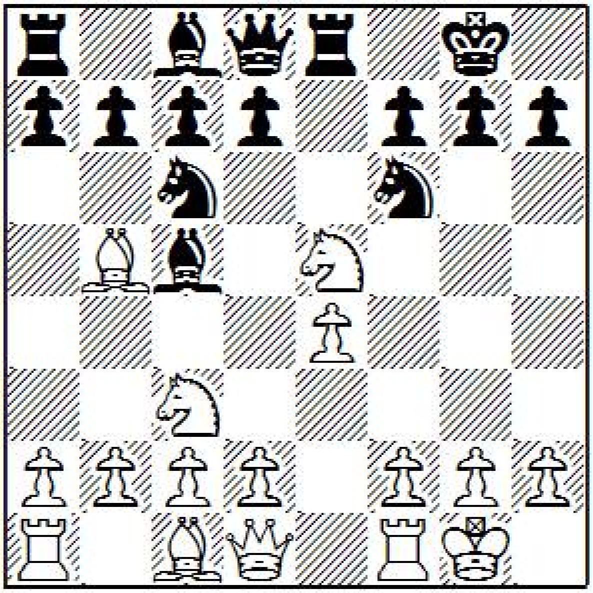
If 5 Nxe5 it is considered quite safe to reply 5 ... Nxe5 (but not 5 ... Bxf2+?! 6 Kxf2 Nxe5 7 d4) 6 d4 Bd6 (after 6 ... Bb4 7 dxe5 Nxe4 8 Qd4! Black fails to equalise) 7 f4 (7 dxe5 Bxe5 is equal) 7 ... Nc6 (inferior is 7 ... Ng6?! 8 e5 Janowski-Lasker, Cambridge Springs 1904) 8 e5 Bb4 9 d5 (9 exf6 Qxf6 is equal) 9 ... Ne4! 10 Qd3 Nxc3+ 11 bxc3 Be7.

5 ... 0-0

Morphy sacrifices a pawn. If 5 ... d6, then 6 d4 exd4 7 Nxd4 Bd7 8 Nf5! (Paulsen-Zukertort, Leipzig 1877).

6 Nxe5 Re8?!

For the pioneers it is always difficult. Later both 6 ... Bd4?! (Schlechter) and 6 ... Nd4?! (Marshall) were tried, but the main variation became 6 ... Nxe5 7 d4 Bd6 8 f4 (8 dxe5 Bxe5 is level, as in Paulsen-Winawer, Baden-Baden 1870) 8 ... Nc6 9 e5 Be7! (9 ... a6 10 Be2 Short-Adams, England 1991; after 9 ... Bb4 10 d5 it is no longer possible to play 10 ... Ne4, and 10 ... a6 11 Be2 Bc5+ 12 Kh1 Nxd5 13 Qxd5 d6 nevertheless favours White) 10 d5 (10 exf6 Bxf6 is equal) 10 ... Nb4 (10 ... Bc5+ 11 Kh1 Nd4 12 exf6 Qxf6 13 Ne4 Qe7 14 Bd3 Bb6 15 f5 with an attack, Paulsen-Anderssen, Leipzig 1877) 11 exf6 (11 d6!? cxd6 12 exf6) 11 ... Bxf6 12 a3 (12 Ne4!?) 12 ... Bxc3 13 bxc3 Nxd5 14 Qxd5 c6 15 Qd3 cxb5 16 f5 with a slight initiative.



7 Nxc6?!

7 Nf3! gives an advantage, for example: 7 ... Nxe4 8 d4 (8 Nxe4 Rxe4 9 d3 Re8 10 d4 is also good) 8 ... Nxc3 9 bxc3 Bf8 (9 ... Be7?! 10 d5 Nb8 11 Bf4 Maróczy-Pillsbury, Nuremberg 1896) 10 d5 Ne5 11 Nxe5 Rxe5 12 Bf4 Re8 13 Qf3 c6 14 Bd3 or 7 ... Nd4 8 e5 Nxf3+ 9 gxf3! (Teichmann-Rubinstein, San Sebastian 1912).

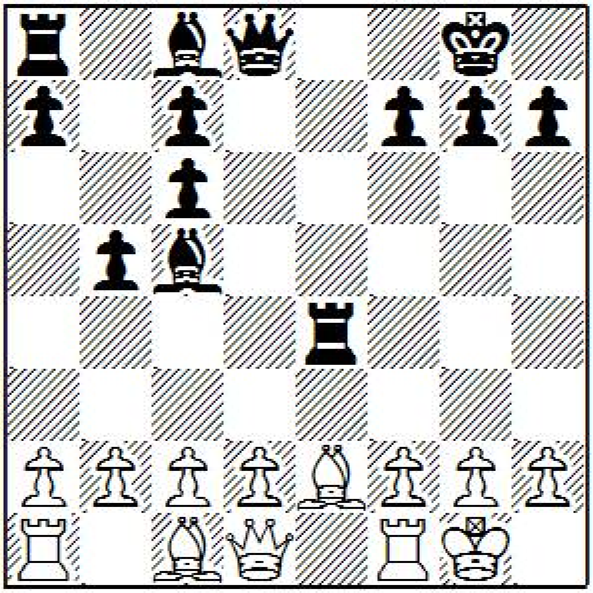
7 ... dxc6 8 Bc4 b5 (but not immediately 8 ... Nxe4? in view of 9 Nxe4 Rxe4 10 Bxf7+ Kxf7 11 Qf3+) **9 Be2**

9 Bb3?! Bg4 10 Qe1 b4 11 Nd1 Rxe4 12 Ne3 is hardly advantageous to White.

9 ... Nxe4 10 Nxe4

Of course, not 10 Bf3? Nxf2! 11 Rxf2 Qd4 12 Ne4 (12 Qf1? Qxf2+! 13 Qxf2 Re1 mate) 12 ... Rxe4! and wins.

10 ... Rxe4

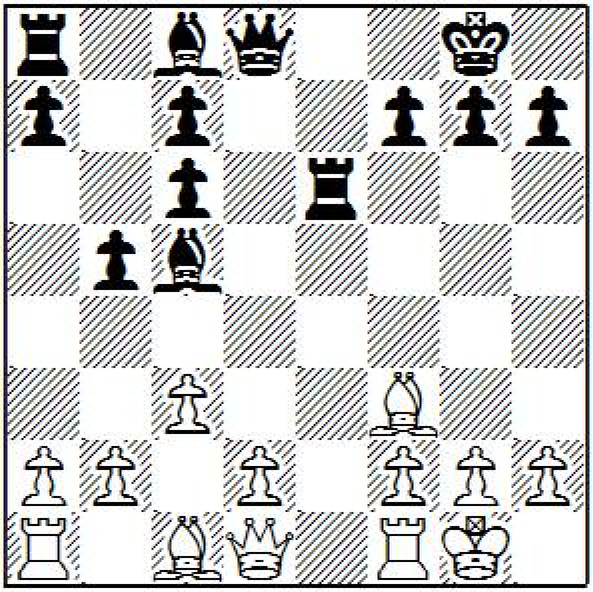


11 Bf3

According to Steinitz, 11 c3 is better, when 11 ... Qh4 is acceptable, for example: 12 d4 Bd6 13 g3 Qh3 (threatening ... Rh4) 14 f4 Bd7 15 Bf3 Re7 (and ... Rae8), or 12 g3 Qe7! (inferior is 12 ... Qh3 13 d3! Re8 14 Bf3 Bd7 15 a4) 13 Bf3 Bh3 14 d4 Bxf1 15 Bxe4 Qxe4 16 Qxf1 Bd6 with a comfortable game.

11 ... Re6 12 c3?

A simply hideous move: who would think of allowing the queen in at d3? Especially since 12 d3 retains a normal position.



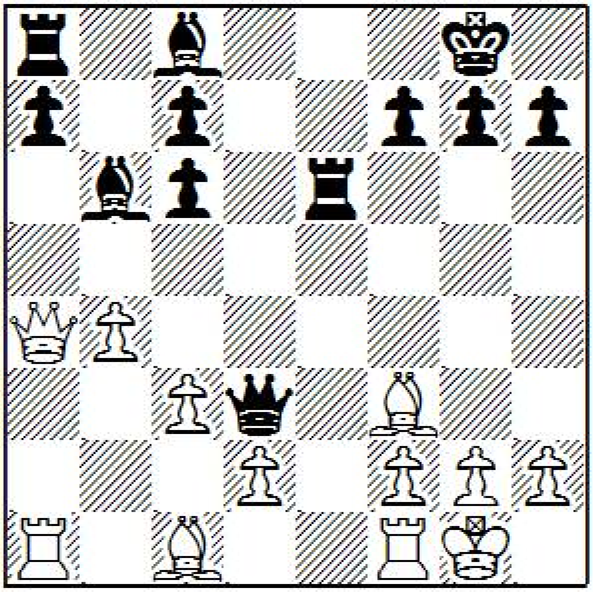
12 ... Qd3!

Of course: the queen completely paralyses White's position.

13 b4?!

This is also dubious. 13 Re1 Rxe1+ 14 Qxe1 looks better, although after 14 ... Bf5! (14 ... Bd7 15 Qf1) 15 Bxc6 (15 Qe2 Rd8!) 15 ... Rd8 16 Qe5 Qc2! (16 ... Bd6? 17 Qxb5 Qc2 18 Qa4) 17 Bf3 Bd6 18 Qxb5 Bd3 19 Qc6 Kf8! Black still has the advantage.

13 ... Bb6 14 a4 bxa4 15 Qxa4



15 ... Bd7?

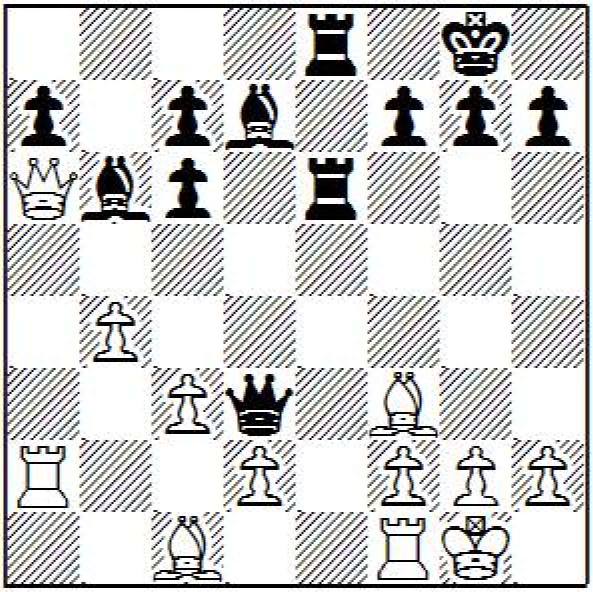
A mistake in reply. Black could have won by 15 ... Bb7! (maintaining control of a6) 16 Ra2 Rae8 17 Qd1 Ba6! 18 Rxa6 Qxa6 19 d4 Qc4 20 Bd2 a5.

16 Ra2?

A fatal error. The queen should have been dislodged from d3 by 16 Qa6!, when the advantage could have passed to White: 16 ... Qxa6?! 17 Rxa6 Rae8 18 Bg4 (but not 18 d4? c5! 19 bxc5 Bb5) 18 ... Bc8 (18 ... R6e7?! 19 Bxd7 Rxd7 20 d4) 19 Ra1 Rf6 20 Bxc8 Rxc8 21 d4, or 16 ... Qf5 (inferior is 16 ... Qg6?! 17 d4 Rae8 18 Bf4) 17 d4 Rae8 18 Be3 c5 19 bxc5 Bxc5 20 Qb7 (not 20 Qa5? Rg6 21 Kh1 Qxf3 22 gxf3 Bc6 and wins; whereas 20 Qe2 Bb6 21 Bg4 Rxe3 22 Bxf5 Rxe2 23 Bxd7 is level) 20 ... Bb6 21 c4. Instead of winning, Black would have had to defend ...

16 ... Rae8 (with the threat of ... Qxf1+) **17 Qa6**

Also hopeless is 17 Qd1 c5 (17 ... Re5!? Neishtadt) 18 bxc5 Bxc5 19 Ba3 (19 Bg4 f5) 19 ... Bxa3 20 Rxa3 Bb5. Paulsen found the correct idea after all, but for some reason a move later. At that time tempo play was still unusual!



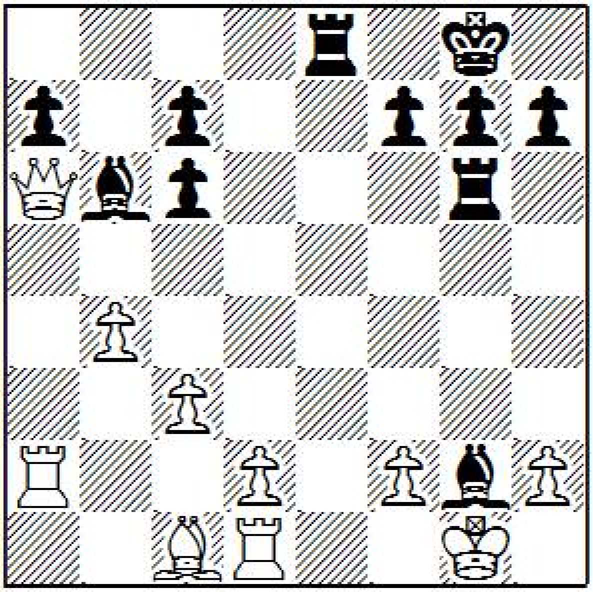
17 ... Qxf3!!

A very pretty refutation.

18 gxf3 Rg6+ 19 Kh1 Bh3 20 Rd1

Or 20 Qd3 (20 Rg1? Rxg1+ 21 Kxg1 Re1+) 20 ... f5! 21 Rd1 (21 Qc4+ Kf8!) 21 ... Bg2+ 22 Kg1 Bxf3+ 23 Kf1 Bxd1 and wins.

20 ... Bg2+ 21 Kg1 Bxf3+ 22 Kf1 Bg2+ (the ‘quiet’ 22 ... Rg2! would have won more quickly: 23 Qd3 Rxf2+ 24 Kg1 Rg2+ 25 Kh1 Rg1 mate – Zukertort) **23 Kg1**



23 ... Bh3+ (Black could have mated by 23 ... Be4+ 24 Kf1 Bf5! 25 Qe2 Bh3+ 26 Ke1 Rg1 – Bauer) **24 Kh1 Bxf2 25 Qf1 Bxf1 26 Rxf1 Re2 27 Ra1 Rh6 28 d4 Be3 0-1**

On becoming USA champion, for a time Morphy settled in New York, where he played 161 games at odds (+107 -36 =18) and 100 on equal terms (+87 -5 =8), in which his opponents included the strongest players of that time, such as Paulsen, Stanley, Lichtenhein and Schulten. One of his wins over the latter was published all over the world.

Game 7

J.Schulten-P.Morphy

New York 1857

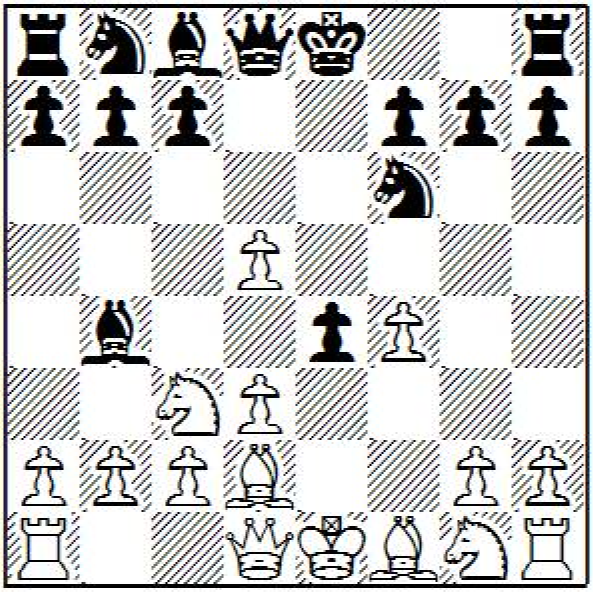
King's Gambit C32

1 e4 e5 2 f4 d5 3 exd5 e4 (the Falkbeer Counter-Gambit, the evaluation of which remains not altogether clear even to this day) **4 Nc3**

More is promised by 4 d3 Nf6 (4 ... Qxd5 5 Qe2, or, as suggested by Keres, 5 Nd2!? exd3 6 Bxd3) 5 dxe4 Nxe4 6 Nf3 Bc5 7 Qe2 Bf5 8 Nc3 Qe7 9 Be3!

4 ... Nf6 5 d3 Bb4 6 Bd2

After 6 dxe4 Nxe4 7 Qd4 Qe7 Black has a comfortable game: 8 Be2 0-0 9 Bd2 Nxd2 10 Qxd2 c6! (10 ... Bg4 has also been played) 11 Nf3 (11 dxc6?! Rd8 12 Qc1 Nxc6; 11 0-0-0 cxd5 12 Bf3 Be6 and ... Nc6) 11 ... cxd5 12 0-0 Nc6 (Bardeleben-Blackburne, London 1895).



6 ... e3!?

'Entirely in Morphy's style! We have here a splendid example of a *positional* sacrifice.' (Euwe) Later they began making this move automatically, occasionally also trying 6 ... exd3 7 Bxd3 0-0. But in the game Spassky-Bronstein (Moscow 1971) Black preferred 6 ... 0-0 and after 7 Nxe4 Re8 8 Bxb4 Nxe4 9 dxe4 Rxe4+ 10 Be2 Rxb4 (a variation by Falkbeer!) 11 Nf3 Rxf4 12 Qd2 Qd6 13 0-0-0 Nd7 14 Nd4 a6 15 g3 Rf6 16 Rhe1 Ne5 17 Bh5 Bd7 18 Qe2 Re8 he gained a draw. Apparently, after 6 ... e3, without going into details, Spassky was intending somewhere to improve on Schulten's play ...

7 Bxe3 0-0 8 Bd2

No better is 8 Be2 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 Nxd5 10 Bd2 Qf6!, or 8 Ne2 Re8 9 Bd2 Bxc3 10 Bxc3 Nxd5 (Schulten-Kolisch, Paris 1860).

8 ... Bxc3

Eliminating the knight, which in some cases could have covered the e-file. For example: 8 ... Nxd5 9 Nxd5 Re8+ 10 Ne3 (10 Be2!?) 10 ... Rxe3+

11 Kf2, or 8 ... Re8+ 9 Be2 (inferior is 9 Nce2?! Bc5, when 10 c4? Ng4 11 Nh3 Qh4+ 12 g3 Nxh2! is not possible, while after 10 Nf3 Qxd5 Black is alright) 9 ... Bg4 10 Ne4! with advantage.

9 bxc3 Re8+

Later there occurred 9 ... Nxd5 10 Qf3 (10 Nf3 Qf6!) 10 ... Re8+ 11 Ne2 Nc6 with double-edged play, although more active is 10 c4! Re8+ 11 Be2 Ne3 (11 ... Nf6 12 Nf3 Qe7 13 Ne5 Nc6 14 Bc3! Estrin) 12 Bxe3 Rxe3 13 Kf2! Re8 (incorrect is 13 ... Qd4? 14 Nf3 Qxf4 15 Qc1 Petroff-Schumoff, St Petersburg 1862) 14 Nf3, and Black still has to find real compensation for the pawn (for example, 14 ... Bg4 15 Qd2 Bxf3 16 Bxf3 Qd4+ 17 Kg3! etc.).

10 Be2 Bg4

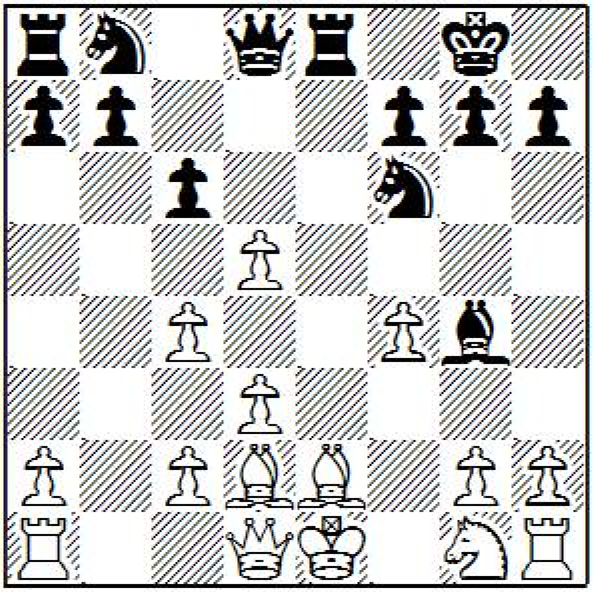
Since Morphy won quickly, one does not feel inclined to criticise this move. Especially since after 10 ... Nxd5 11 c4!, as it follows from the previous note, it is not obvious that Black can equalise.

11 c4?!

‘This “greedy” move is the decisive (*? – G. K.*) mistake. White could have escaped from the pin, firstly, by 11 h3 Bxe2 12 Nxe2 Qe7 (12 ... Nxd5 13 0-0) 13 Kf2 *(in my opinion, 13 c4!? c6 14 dxc6 Nxc6 15 Kf2 Qc5+ 16 Kg3 Re6 17 Kh2 Rae8 18 Ng3 is more promising – G. K.)* 13 ... Nxd5 14 Re1 Ne3 15 Qc1. Secondly, there was also the more useful move 11 Kf2, after which it is not easy for Black to demonstrate that his initiative is worth the sacrificed pawn.’ (Neishtadt)

According to Estrin, however, after 11 h3 stronger is 11 ... Qxd5! 12 Kf2 (12 hxg4? Qxg2) 12 ... Bxe2 13 Nxe2 Qc5+! ‘with the initiative for Black’ (although the position after 14 Kg3 is by no means so clear), whereas perhaps 11 Kf2 is indeed useful: 11 ... Bxe2 12 Nxe2 Qxd5 13 Rf1 (13 Re1 Nc6 14 Kg1 Qc5+! 15 d4 Qd5 is equal) 13 ... Nc6 (13 ... Qc5+ 14 Kg3 Qh5 15 Nd4; 13 ... Ng4+!?) 14 Kg1 Qc5+ 15 Kh1 Ng4 16 Nd4 with a slight advantage.

11 ... c6!

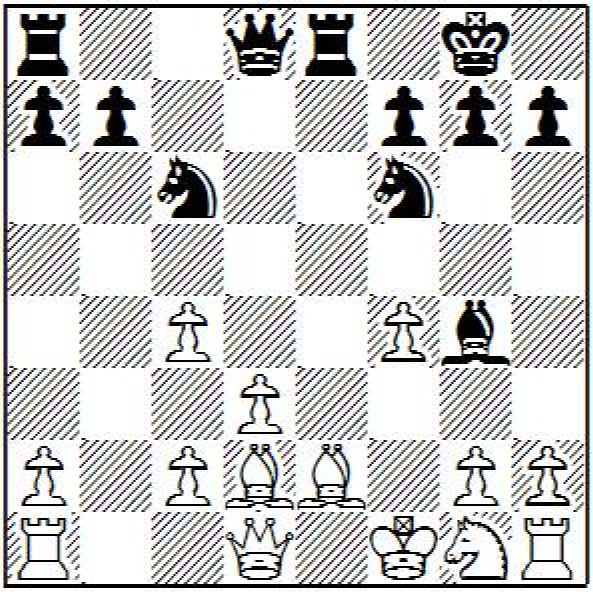


12 dxc6??

But this really is the decisive mistake, the move of roughly a third category player. Absolutely essential was 12 h3 Bxe2 13 Nxe2 cxd5 14 cxd5 Qxd5 15 0-0 with an extra pawn, for which Black has some compensation, but not more. Now, however, he has an enormous lead in development and an irresistible attack.

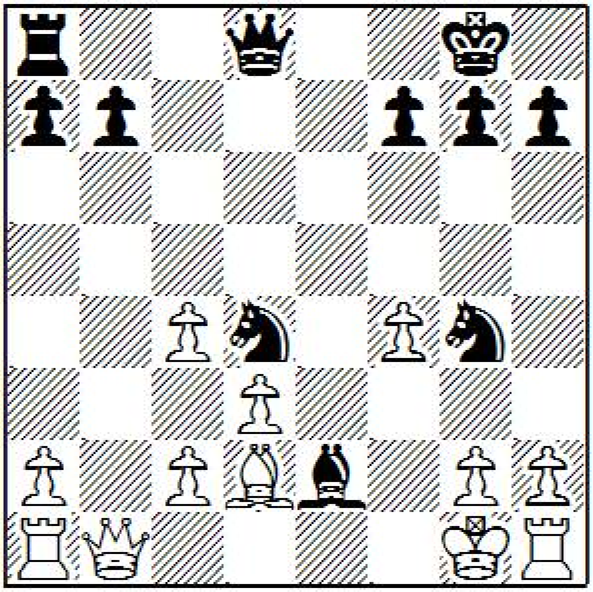
12 ... Nxc6 (with the threat of ... Nd4) **13 Kf1**

White would no longer have saved the game by 13 h3 Bxe2 14 Nxe2 Nd4, or 13 Bc3 Nd4 14 Bxd4 Qxd4 15 Nf3 Bxf3 16 gxf3 Nh5, or 13 Kf2 Qb6+ (but not 13 ... Rxe2+? 14 Nxe2 Nd4 15 Re1) 14 Kg3 Rxe2 15 Nxe2 Nd4.



13 ... Rxe2! (disaster strikes on e2) **14 Nxe2 Nd4 15 Qb1 Bxe2+ 16 Kf2** (16 Kg1 Nxc2 and 16 Ke1 Qe7 are equally hopeless) **16 ... Ng4+ 17 Kg1**

If 17 Ke1 (17 Kg3 Nf5+ and ... Qh4 mate), then 17 ... Qh4+ 18 g3 Qe7 or 18 ... Re8!



17 ... Nf3+! (forcing mate in seven moves) **18 gxf3 Qd4+ 19 Kg2 Qf2+ 20 Kh3 Qxf3+ 21 Kh4**

Here Black announced mate in three: 21 ... Ne3 22 Rg1 Nf5+ 23 Kg5 Qh5 mate.

Morphy dreamed of playing the chess king of the 1840s – Staunton, and his friends sent the latter an invitation to visit America. But Staunton declined, and then Morphy himself set off for Europe. In June 1858 he arrived in England, where he easily demonstrated his superiority over the local masters, brilliantly winning a match against Löwenthal (spending the prize on ... furniture for the flat of his hard-up opponent!), but, alas, after lengthy discussions he did not achieve his main aim – a match with the 48-year-old English champion.

The explanation is obvious – here we can again recall the words of Fischer: ‘Staunton appears to have been afraid to meet Morphy and I think his fears were well-founded. Morphy would have beaten him, but it wouldn’t have been the one-sided encounter that many writers now think it would. It would have been a great struggle.’

The others were crushed one after another by the young American, and in highly spectacular style.

Game 8

H.Bird-P.Morphy

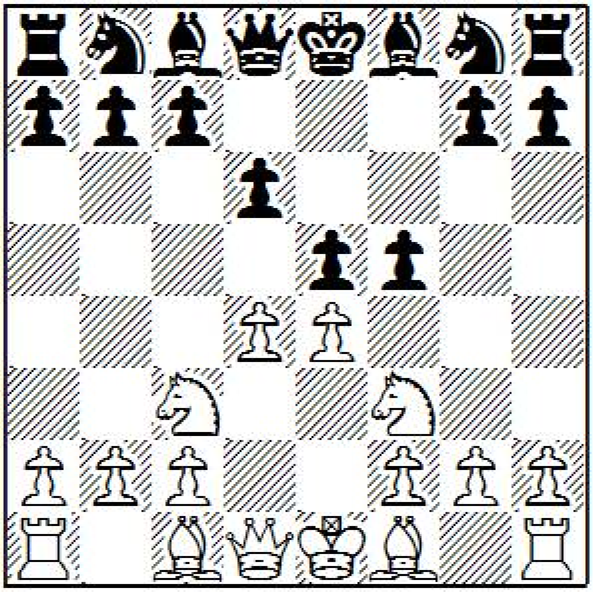
London 1858

Philidor Defence C41

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 f5?!

Philidor’s move, which was fashionable at that time, but which is objectively more than dubious, and perhaps even losing.

4 Nc3



Also good is 4 Bc4, as well as 4 dxe5 fxe4 5 Ng5 d5 6 e6 (6 Nc3!?) 6 ... Bc5 7 Nc3! (but not immediately 7 Nf7? Qf6 8 Be3 d4 with a counterattack, Barnes-Morphy, London 1858) 7 ... c6 (7 ... Qf6 8 Ngxe4 dxe4 9 Qh5+ and Qxc5) 8 Nf7, which was suggested back in 1880 by Johann Berger.

4 ... fxe4

Black fails to equalise with either 4 ... Nf6 5 dxe5 Nxe4 6 Nxe4 fxe4 7 Ng5 d5 8 e6 Bc5 9 Nxe4 Be7 10 Qh5+ g6 11 Qe5 Rg8 12 Ng5, or 4 ... exd4 5 Qxd4 fxe4 6 Bg5 Nf6 7 Nxe4 Be7 8 Bc4 Nc6 9 Qe3.

5 Nxe4 d5

Or 5 ... Nf6 6 Nxf6+ gxf6 (if 6 ... Qxf6, then 7 Bg5 Qg6 8 dxe5 Zukertort) 7 dxe5 fxe5 8 Bc4 Qf6 9 Ng5 with an obvious advantage.

6 Ng3?!

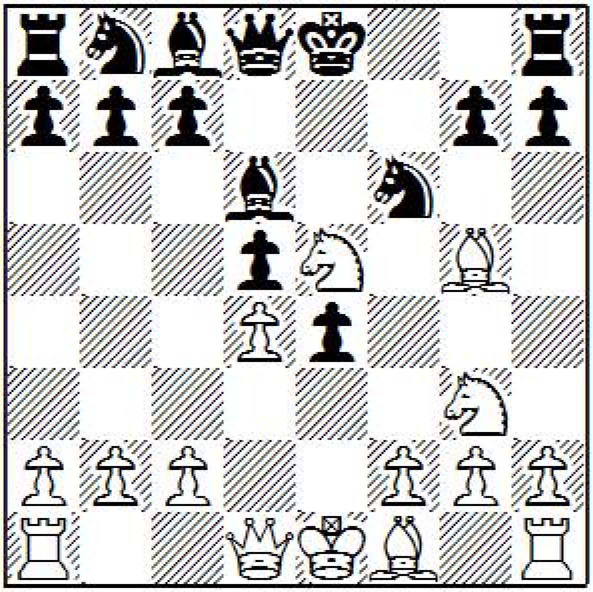
As was shown by Zukertort, stronger is 6 Nxe5! dxe4 7 Qh5+ g6 8 Nxg6 Nf6 9 Qe5+ Be7 10 Nxh8 Nc6 11 Bb5 Qd5 12 Bg5. And in the event of 9 ... Kf7 10 Bc4+ Kg7 (10 ... Kxg6?? 11 Qg5 mate) 11 Bh6+ Kxh6 12 Nxh8 Bb4+ 13 c3 Qxh8 14 cxb4 (Keres), White’s advantage is close to being decisive.

6 ... e4 7 Ne5 Nf6 8 Bg5?!

Correct is 8 f3!, advantageously undermining the centre.

8 ... Bd6

‘A move typical of Morphy, striving as soon as possible to overcome his lack of development.’ (Euwe) In Maróczy’s opinion, 8 ... Be7 was more circumspect.



9 Nh5?! 0-0 10 Qd2?! Qe8! 11 g4?

After a series of incomprehensible moves, Bird commits a decisive mistake. ‘However, had it not been for this move, chess literature would not have been enriched with one of Morphy’s most staggering and profound combinations ... After 11 Nxf6+! (11 Bxf6 Qxh5) 11 ... gxf6 12 Bxf6 Rxf6 (12 ... Qh5 13 g4) 13 Qg5+ Rg6 14 Nxg6 hxg6! 15 Qxd5+ (or 15 h4) the game would have become equal.’ (Maróczy) Euwe does not agree with this evaluation: ‘In the resulting open position the strength of the two black bishops should quickly tell.’ But in my opinion, White would have been lucky to reach such a position, since in fact he is destroyed by the interposition of 12 ... e3! (this Morphy would not have missed!) 13 Qxe3 Rxf6 14 0-0-0 (14 Qg5+ Rg6) 14 ... Bf8 etc.

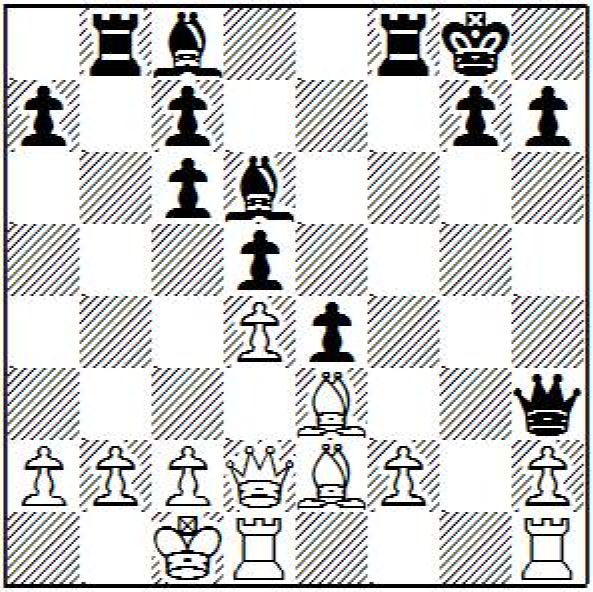
Bird’s mistake is fully understandable: he already had a difficult choice ...

11 ... Nxg4 12 Nxg4 Qxh5 13 Ne5 Nc6 14 Be2 Qh3 15 Nxc6 bxc6 16 Be3 Rb8

The prelude to a combination, although the immediate 16 ... Bg4 was more efficient, when Black is a very healthy pawn to the good.

17 0-0-0

'Safer is 17 c3,' (Maróczy) if one can say this about a hopeless position.



17 ... Rxf2?!

I raise my hat to the great chess artist, but the crude 17 ... Bg4! was correct, or even, according to Euwe, the slow 17 ... Bf5 and ... Bg6.

18 Bxf2 Qa3!!

But not 18 ... Ba3? 19 Qe3! Alas, even this brilliant queen manoeuvre does not give more than a draw ...

19 c3!

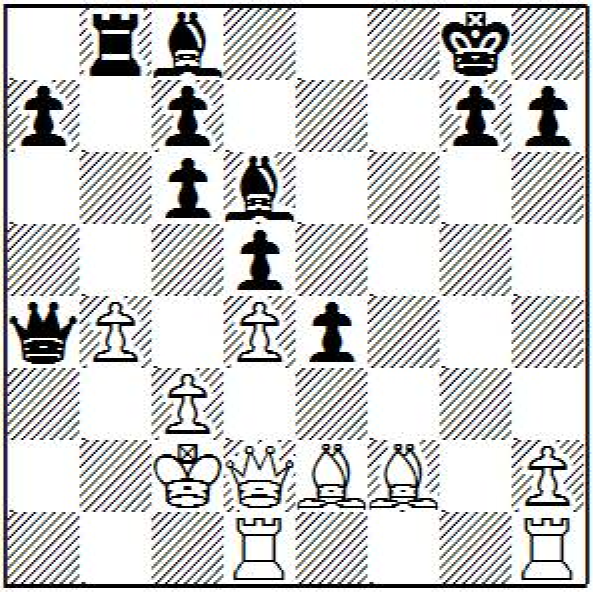
If 19 Qg5 Maróczy gives the winning variation 19 ... Qxb2+ 20 Kd2 Bb4+ 21 Ke3 Qa3+! 22 Bd3 (22 Kf4? Bd6+) 22 ... Ba6 23 Rhg1 Bf8! and ... exd3, while if 19 Qc3 – 19 ... Qxa2 20 Rdg1 g6 21 b3 Bb4! Instead of 19 ... Qxa2 even stronger is 19 ... Bf4+! 20 Rd2 Qxa2 21 Qa3 Qxa3 22 bxa3 e3 and wins (Euwe), or 21 b3 Bd6! (simpler than 21 ... e3 22 Bxe3 Bxe3 23 Rf1 a5! etc.) 22 Rdd1 Bb4 winning.

19 ... Qxa2

Grandmaster Murey tried to find a win after 19 ... e3?! 20 Bxe3 Bf5, but without success: 21 Qc2! Qxa2 22 Bd3 Bxd3 (22 ... Ba3 or 22 ... Rxb2 – 23 Bxf5) 23 Rxd3 Ba3 (23 ... Rxb2 24 Qxb2 Ba3 25 Qxa3!) 24 Qb1! (24 bxa3 Qa1+ 25 Kd2 Qxh1 26 c4! Qxh2+ 27 Kc3 will also do) 24 ... Bxb2+

25 Kc2 Qa4+ 26 Kd2 Bxc3+ 27 Rxc3 Rxb1 28 Rxb1 Qa2+ 29 Kc1, parrying the attack and retaining the extra material.

20 b4 (forced: mate in two was threatened, and if 20 Qc2? there is a choice between 20 ... Bf4+ and 20 ... Rxb2 21 Qxb2 Ba3 22 Qxa3 Qxa3+ 23 Kd2 Qb2+ 24 Ke1 Qxc3+) **20 ... Qa1+ 21 Kc2 Qa4+**



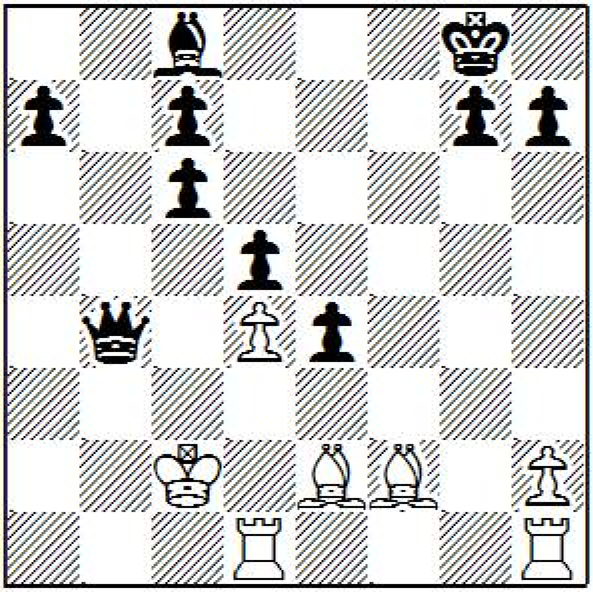
22 Kb2?

According to Maróczy, 22 Kc1! would have forced a draw by perpetual check (22 ... Qa1+), since 22 ... Bxb4? is wrong in view of 23 cxb4 Rxb4 24 Qg5 (24 Qc2 Qa3+ 25 Kd2 Rb2 26 Rc1 is also possible) 24 ... Qa3+ 25 Kd2 Rb2+ 26 Ke1 Rxe2+ 27 Kxe2 Qf3+ 28 Ke1 Qxh1+ 29 Qg1 Qf3 30 Qg3.

Now, with the help of a computer, it can be established that 22 ... Bf5! (22 ... a5 23 Qc2 Qa3+ 24 Qb2 axb4 25 Kc2 Ba6 26 Bf1! is unclear) 23 Be1! Qa1+ 24 Kc2 e3+ 25 Kb3 exd2 26 Rxa1 Re8 27 Ba6 dxe1Q 28 Raxe1 Rxe1 29 Rxe1 Bxh2 30 Bb7 Be4 31 Bxc6 Kf7 would nevertheless have given Black a minimal advantage (obviously less than after 17 ... Bg4!: here it is far closer to a draw). This is the present-day level of attack and defence, illustrating the colossal progress in chess during the past hundred plus years.

22 ... Bxb4 23 cxb4 Rxb4+ 24 Qxb4 Qxb4+ 25 Kc2

If 25 Ka2 Black wins by 25 ... c5! 26 dxc5 e3! 27 Bxe3 d4.



25 ... e3!

This reply was overlooked by Bird – but it is hard to demand of a master from the mid-19th century that he should be able to weigh up all the consequences of 18 ... Qa3!! and 22 ... Bxb4. Whereas Morphy's sound framework and his wide-ranging tactics already resemble the play of a modern grandmaster. To combat such a hurricane was simply impossible.

26 Bxe3 Bf5+ 27 Rd3 (or 27 Bd3 Qc4+) **27 ... Qc4+ 28 Kd2 Qa2+ 29 Kd1 Qb1+ 0-1**

Early in the autumn of 1858 Morphy moved on to Paris, where he won a match against the French champion Daniel Harrwitz. The winner was to be the first to win seven games, but after a string of failures Harrwitz 'fell ill' and the arbiter ruled that he had been defeated (+5 -2 =1). Curiously, Morphy considered that the event was not altogether complete and he give up his small prize to pay for the great Anderssen to travel from Breslau to Paris, if the latter wished to play a 'friendly match'. Anderssen, naturally, accepted the challenge, but informed Morphy that he would be unable to give up his teaching work in the middle of the school year and that he would arrive only for the Christmas holiday ...

While he was waiting, Morphy gave some simultaneous displays (as in England, with particular success playing blindfold), and played some friendly games with the French masters, including Arnous de Rivière and

Saint-Amant (his future second in the match with Anderssen), and also with some less strong – but more distinguished! – opponents. The most famous of these games was played against two consultants – the Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard – in a box during a performance at the Opera Theatre.

Game 9

P.Morphy-Consultants

Friendly game, Paris 1858

Philidor Defence C41

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 Bg4?

Nowadays every schoolboy knows that this is bad, but in those days it was even played by Harrwitz!

4 dxe5 Bxf3 5 Qxf3 dxe5 6 Bc4 Nf6?

The decisive mistake. True, Black had an unpleasant choice between 6 ... Qf6 7 Qb3 Bc5 (the spectacular variation 7 ... b6?! 8 Nc3 Ne7? 9 Nb5 Na6 10 Qa4 Nc5 11 Nd6+! Kd8 12 Qe8 mate was pointed out long ago in Greco’s treatise!) 8 0-0 Bb6 9 a4 a5 10 Nc3 Ne7 11 Be3 Nd7 12 Rad1 and 6 ... Qd7 7 Qb3 followed by Nc3, 0-0 and Rd1 – in both cases White has an obvious advantage.

7 Qb3 (a classic double attack) **7 ... Qe7**

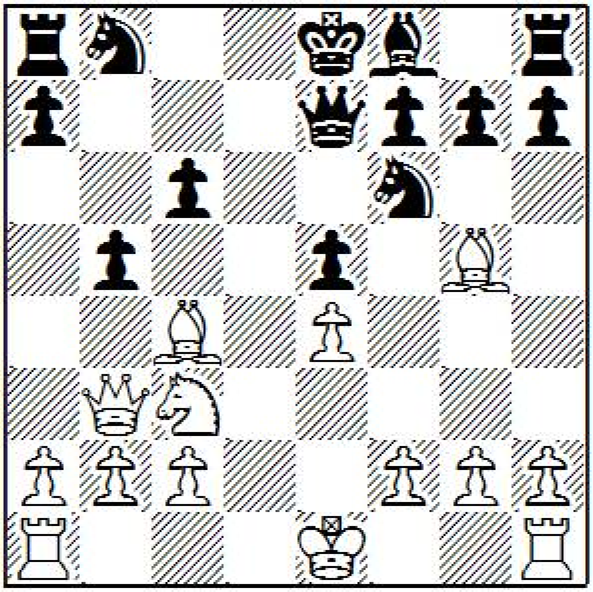
In a game played a month earlier Morphy-Harrwitz (Paris 8th matchgame 1858) Black preferred to suffer a pawn down after 7 ... Bd6 (7 ... Qd7? 8 Qxb7) 8 Bxf7+ and he resigned on the 59th move.

8 Nc3!?

For the sake of rapid development Morphy avoids the exchange of queens, although after 8 Bxf7+! (8 Qxb7 Qb4+ 9 Qxb4 Bxb4+ 10 Bd2 is rather a ‘small’ achievement) 8 ... Kd8 (or 8 ... Qxf7 9 Qxb7) 9 Qxb7 Qb4+ 10 Qxb4 Bxb4+ 11 c3 Black can resign.

8 ... c6 9 Bg5 b5?

An attempt to solve all the problems in one go. ‘Black would hardly have saved the game by 9 ... Na6 10 Bxa6 bxa6 11 Qc4 or 9 ... h6 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 0-0-0, while 9 ... Qc7 10 0-0-0 Bc5 would have been refuted by the simple 11 Bxf7+! Qxf7 12 Rd8+.’ (Neishtadt)



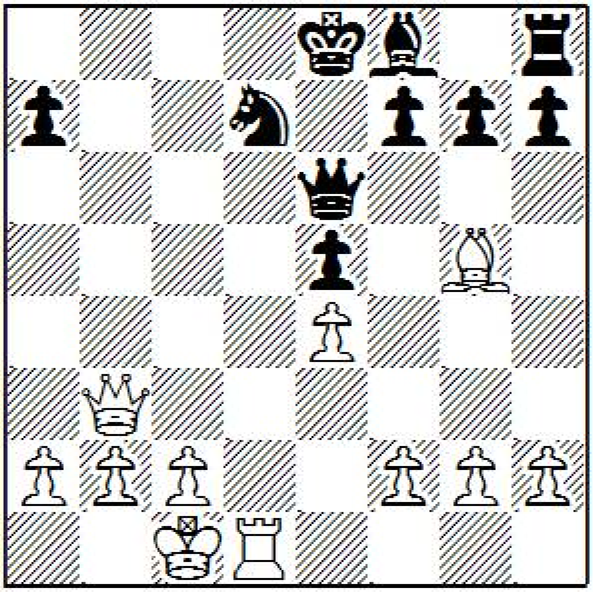
10 Nxb5! (but not 10 Be2? Qb4!) **10 ... cxb5 11 Bxb5+ Nbd7** (or 11 ... Kd8 12 0-0-0+) **12 0-0-0 Rd8**

If 12 ... Qb4?, then 13 Bxf6.

13 Rxd7!

‘White lands successive blows, and each time with gain of tempo.’ (Euwe) ‘Morphy is in his element. The brilliant combination with sacrifices makes this game one of the most beautiful achievements in the entire history of chess.’ (Maróczy)

13 ... Rxd7 14 Rd1 Qe6 (14 ... Qb4? 15 Bxf6) **15 Bxd7+** (15 Bxf6 was a drier alternative) **15 ... Nxd7**



16 Qb8+!! Nxb8 17 Rd8 mate ‘A sparkling finish!’ (Euwe)

But then December came, and Anderssen arrived in Paris. They agreed to play up to seven wins, and a few days later, with Morphy hardly having managed to recover from illness, there began the historic match between the two most striking and undoubtedly the strongest players of the mid-19th century.

Again, as in his match with Harrwitz, Morphy began with a loss. But then he gained a draw and ... won five games in a row! Anderssen simply no longer knew that to do: with White he despaired of playing 1 e4 and switched to his patent move 1 a3 (which he later called ‘crazy’), and with the black pieces he unsuccessfully tried 1 ... e5, 1 ... d5, ...e6 and 1 ... c5.

Game 10

P.Morphy-A.Anderssen

Match, Paris 1858, 9th game

Sicilian Defence B44

1 e4 c5 (Anderssen, after La Bourdonnais and Staunton, was one of the pioneers of the Sicilian Defence) **2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e6 5 Nb5 d6**

It is hard to believe that this modern *tabiya* occurred a century and a half ago!

6 Bf4

Fischer’s favourite, but later everyone began preferring Karpov’s favourite move 6 c4.

6 ... e5 7 Be3 f5?

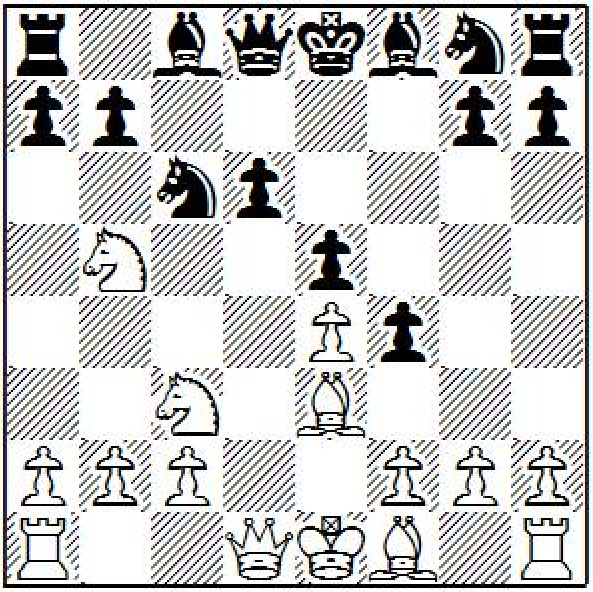
More than a hundred years were required, in order to show that after 7 ... Nf6 8 Bg5 Be6 Black has nothing to worry about, for example: 9 N1c3 a6 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Na3 d5! etc. (Fischer-Petrosian, Buenos Aires 1st matchgame 1971). However, Anderssen with his aggressive style wanted to hasten a crisis in the centre: previously such methods had always worked for him.

8 N1c3!

Morphy sensed that chess logic was on his side, and he found an immediate refutation of Black’s premature activity.

8 ... f4

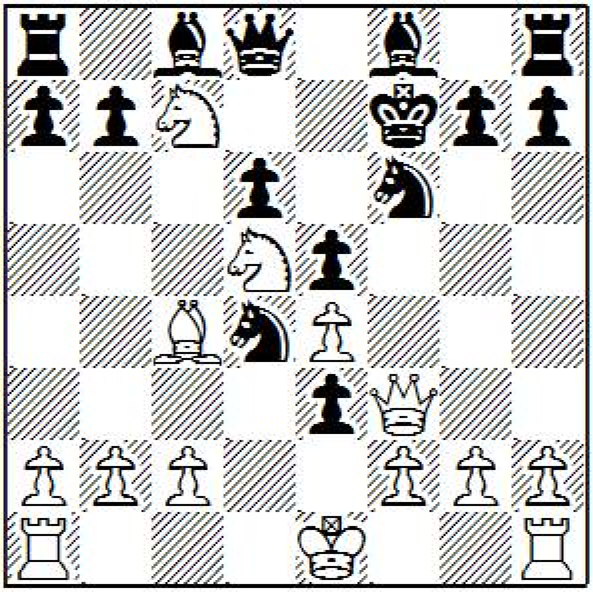
If 8 ... a6, then 9 Nd5! axb5 10 Bb6 Qh4 11 Nc7+ Kd7 12 Nxa8 Qxe4+ 13 Qe2 is decisive. ‘And after 8 ... Nf6 9 Bg5 a6 (9 ... Be7 10 Bxf6 gxf6? 11 Qh5+ Kf8 12 Bc4 Qe8 13 Qh6 mate) 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Qh5+ Kd7 12 Qxf5+ Ke8 13 Qh5+ Kd7 14 Na3 White is a pawn up with the better position.’ (Maróczy)



9 Nd5! fxe3 (there is already no way back) **10 Nbc7+ Kf7 11 Qf3+?!**

11 Nxa8 was probably stronger, for example: 11 ... exf2+ 12 Kxf2 Qh4+ 13 g3 Qxe4 14 Bg2. But Morphy did not want to divert his sights from the enemy king, and this presumptuousness allowed some counter-chances ...

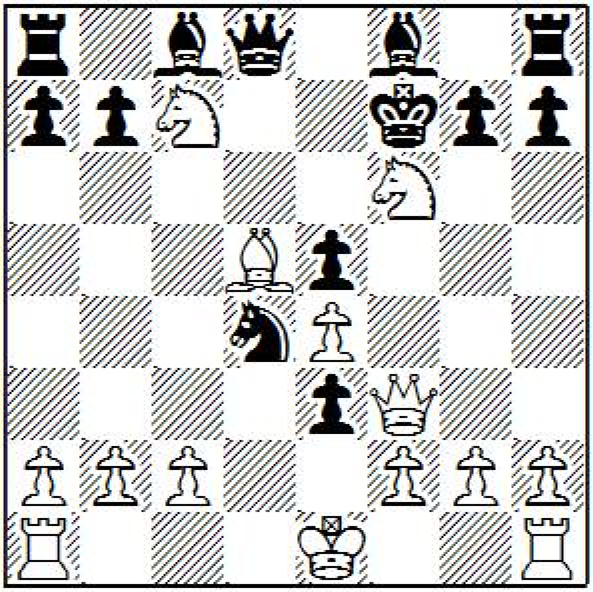
11 ... Nf6 12 Bc4 Nd4!



13 Nxf6+ d5!

Bad is 13 ... Ke7 14 Nfd5+ Kd7 15 Qf7+ Be7 (15 ... Kc6 16 Nb4+) 16 fxe3 Rf8 (or 16 ... Nxc2+ 17 Kd2) 17 exd4 Rxf7 18 Bb5 mate. It is doubtful whether Anderssen worked out all the consequences of 13 ... Kg6, but his combinative feeling did not let him down: 14 Qh5+ Kxf6 15 Ne8+ (Maróczy suggested ‘15 fxe3!, as in the game’, but here after 15 ... Qxc7 16 Rf1+ Nf5 it comes to nothing) 15 ... Qxe8 16 Qxe8 Nxc2+ (16 ... d5 17 0-0-0!) 17 Kf1 e2+! (17 ... Nxa1 18 g4!) 18 Bxe2 Nxa1 19 g4! and Black, despite the favourable material balance, is helpless against the new wave of the attack.

14 Bxd5+



The critical moment of the battle.

14 ... Kg6?

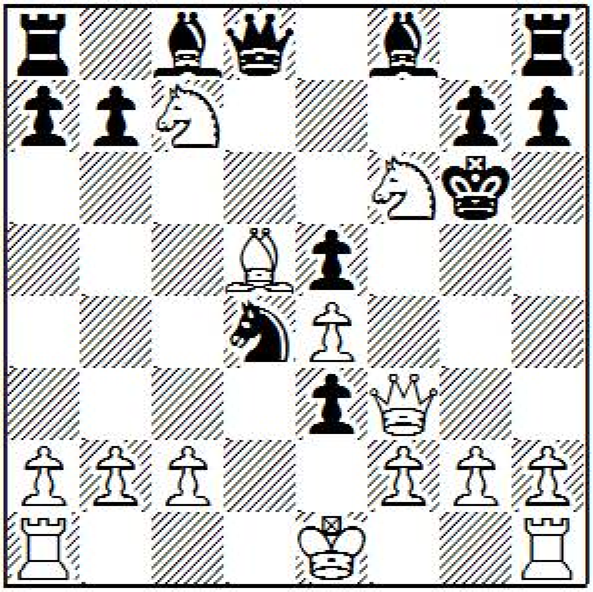
‘An oversight! Black thought that after 15 Qh5+ Kxf6 16 Qf7+ (*now 16 Ne8+? is not possible because of 16 ... Qxe8 17 Qxe8 Bb4+ – G. K.*) 16 ... Kg5 he would be able to save his king, but he overlooked 16 fxe3! with a decisive attack on the f-file. The game was played very quickly, otherwise Anderssen would undoubtedly have noticed this simple move,’ writes Maróczy. ‘It was possible to avoid the immediate danger by 14 ... Qxd5 15 Nfxd5+ Nxf3+ 16 gxf3 exf2+ 17 Kxf2 Bc5+ 18 Ke2 Rb8 when Black, with two bishops against two knights, does not stand badly.’ But in my opinion he is a simply a pawn down, and after 19 b4 Bf8 (19 ... Bd6 20 Nb5) 20 Rhd1 (or 20 c4 immediately) 20 ... Bd7 21 c4 he has a technically lost ending.

White would have been caused more problems by Zukertort’s suggestion of 14 ... Ke7:

1) 15 Ng8+?! Kd6 16 Qf7 Nxc2+ 17 Kd1 (17 Ke2 Bg4+ 18 f3 Nd4+ 19 Kxe3 Qxc7 20 Qxc7+ Kxc7 21 fxg4 Bd6) 17 ... Nxa1 18 Nxa8 Bg4+ 19 f3 Bd7! and Black is winning;

2) 15 Qh5 gxf6 16 Qf7+ Kd6 17 Nxa8! (the only way: 17 Ne8+? Qxe8 18 Qxe8 Nxc2+ 19 Kf1 e2+ 20 Kg1 Nxa1 etc.) 17 ... Nxc2+ (17 ... Qe7 18 0-0-0) 18 Ke2 Qe7 19 Qxe7+ Bxe7 20 Rac1 Nd4+ 21 Kxe3 Bd7 22 Rc7!

Rxa8 23 Rxb7 Bc6 24 Bxc6 Nxc6 25 Rc1 Nd8 26 Rd1+ Ke6 27 Rc7 Rb8. According to Maróczy, 'White's position is slightly better,' but in my view after 28 b3 Black cannot hold out.



15 Qh5+ Kxf6 16 fxe3!

Perhaps Anderssen was hoping that his young opponent would lose his way in the mass of tactical complications, but Morphy maintained a clear head. It turns out that the king can be finished off on the open f-file not only in the King's Gambit ...

16 ... Nxc2+

This loses immediately, but 16 ... Qxc7 would merely have prolonged the agony: 17 Rf1+ (much clearer than Maróczy's suggestion of 17 exd4 Ke7 18 0-0-0) 17 ... Nf5 (17 ... Ke7? 18 Rf7+) 18 Rxf5+! Bxf5 19 Qxf5+ Ke7 20 Qe6+ Kd8 21 0-0-0! Bd6 (or 21 ... Qd7 22 Bxb7) 22 Bxb7 etc.

17 Ke2 1-0

Black resigned in view of the continuation 17 ... Nxa1 18 Rf1+ Ke7 19 Qxe5+ Kd7 20 Be6+ Kc6 21 Rc1+ Kb6 22 Qb5 mate.

An impressive defeat of the champion of the Old World! This game lasted all of half an hour. After gaining revenge on the 77th move in the very next game, Anderssen joked gloomily: 'Morphy wins in 17 moves, whereas it takes me 77. However, this is still bearable ... ' By winning the

11th game, Morphy won the match (+7 -2 =2), and thus in just one year he had demonstrated that he had no equal in the world.

‘Morphy possesses the secret of invincibility,’ the newspapers enthused. The loser, although shocked, also worthily assessed his opponent’s triumph, publicly declaring that Morphy played much more strongly and solidly than La Bourdonnais, and admitting: ‘It is useless fighting against this man; for me he is too strong. He is accurate and faultless, like a machine, whereas I am only a mere mortal ... ’ Later Anderssen shared an important observation: ‘Morphy treats chess with the seriousness and conscientiousness of an artist ... For him a game of chess is a sacred duty ... ’

Before Morphy left Paris a splendid farewell banquet was held in his honour. To the applause of the public, the chairman Saint-Amant crowned with a laurel wreath a marble bust, specially made for the occasion, of the ‘king of all kings’, which became one of the sights of the Café de la Régence.

Paul was greeted even more triumphantly in New York. An official celebration in his honour took place in a hall seating two thousand, where enormous shields were erected with the names of his defeated opponents. When Morphy appeared a hymn was played; then the chess king was presented with a gift from the nation – a rosewood table, encrusted with pearl and silver, a chess board with squares of mother-of-pearl and ebony, with gold and silver pieces on cornelian pedestals ... He was also presented with a gold clock with diamonds, where the hours were indicated by red and black chess pieces. For the first time in the history of chess a victory was recognised as an event of national importance!

Alas, after this Morphy abandoned the chess arena forever. In the early 60s, when the Civil War broke out in the USA, he showed the first signs of mental disorder, and within a few years it turned out that the great maestro was lost not only to chess ... In the 70s he could be seen just once a day, always at the same time, walking the streets of New Orleans. Legend has it that not long before his death, in 1882, he exchanged greetings with Zukertort, who was performing in the town, and that in 1883 he chatted for about ten minutes at his home with Steinitz ... In the summer of 1884, at the age of 47, the legendary American passed away.

What was the secret of Morphy’s invincibility? I think that it was a combination of a unique natural talent and brilliant erudition. His play was the next, more mature stage in the development of chess. Morphy had a well-developed ‘feeling for position’, and therefore he can be confidently regarded as the ‘first swallow’ – the prototype of the strong 20th century grandmaster.

Like Philidor previously, Morphy was greatly ahead of his time. As Euwe put it: ‘if the distinguishing feature of a genius is that he is far ahead compared with his epoch, then Morphy was a chess genius in the complete sense of the word.’ He spontaneously established the three main principles of opening play: 1) the rapid development of the pieces; 2) the seizure of the centre; 3) the opening of lines. To formulate these and other principles of positional play required a further quarter of a century and the mighty intellect of the next chess titan – Wilhelm Steinitz ...

In conclusion, here are some interesting views of the world champions.

Lasker: ‘In Paul Morphy the spirit of La Bourdonnais had arisen anew, only more vigorous, firmer, prouder ... Morphy discovered that the brilliant move of a master is essentially conditional not on a sudden and inexplicable realisation, but on the placing of the pieces on the board. He introduced the rule: brilliant moves and deep winning manoeuvres are possible only in those positions where the opponent can be opposed with an abundance of active energy ... From the very first moves Morphy aimed to disclose the internal energy located in his pieces. It was suddenly revealed that they possess far greater dynamism than the opponent’s forces.’

Capablanca: ‘Reviewing the history of chess from La Bourdonnais to the masters of our day right up to Lasker, we discover that the greatest stylist was Morphy. He did not look for complicated combinations, but he also did not avoid them, which really is the correct way of playing ... His main strength lay not in his combinative gift, but in his positional play and general style. Morphy gained most of his wins by playing directly and simply, and it is this simple and logical method that constitutes the true brilliance of his play, if it is considered from the viewpoint of the great masters.’

Alekhine: ‘How much more vivid, more rich does the figure of Morphy appear before us, how much clearer does the secret of his success and charm become, if we transfer ourselves in our thoughts to that era when he lived and created, if we take the trouble to study, if only a little, his contemporaries! Then ... in London and in particular in Paris, where the traditions of Philidor were still alive, where the immortal creations of La Bourdonnais and McDonnell were still in the memory, at that time, finally, when Anderssen was alive, and with brilliance alone it was hardly possible to surprise anyone. The strength, the invincible strength of Morphy – this was the reason for his success and the guarantee of his immortality!' And Morphy's strength, according to Alekhine, was his 'deeply considered positional play, primarily of an aggressive character.'

Botvinnik: 'To this day Morphy is an unsurpassed master of the open games. Just how great was his significance is evident from the fact that after Morphy nothing substantially new has been created in this field. Every player – from beginner to master – should in his praxis return again and again to the games of the American genius.'

Fischer: 'A popularly held theory about Paul Morphy is that if he returned to the chess world today and played our best contemporary players, he would come out the loser. Nothing is further from the truth. In a set match, Morphy would beat anybody alive today ... Morphy was perhaps the most accurate chess player who ever lived. He had complete sight of the board and never blundered, in spite of the fact that he played quite rapidly, rarely taking more than five minutes to decide a move. (His opponents, in those days before chess clocks, often took hours.)' Perhaps his only weakness was in closed games like the Dutch Defence. But even then, he was usually victorious because of his resourcefulness.'

Smyslov: 'There is no doubt that for Morphy chess was an art, and for chess Morphy was a great artist. His play was captivated by freshness of thought and inexhaustible energy. He played with inspiration, without striving to penetrate into the psychology of the opponent; he played, if one can express it so, "pure chess". His harmonious positional understanding and deep intuition would have made Morphy a highly dangerous opponent even for any player of our times.'

It would appear that each world champion considered Morphy's play through the prism of his own approach to chess. Each found in him the source of his own strength! And so, summing up all that has been said, Morphy can be regarded as the forefather of modern chess.

Chapter Two
Wilhelm the First

Wilhelm Steinitz (14 May 1836 – 2 August 1900) was not only the first world champion, but also a great researcher, the creator of a new, *positional chess school*. His life's work was fully appreciated by the next chess king – Lasker:

'When Paul Morphy, despairing of life, renounced chess, Caissa fell into deep mourning and into dreary thoughts ... The games of the masters of that period are planless; the great models of the past are known, and the masters try to follow them and to equal them, but they do not succeed. The masters give themselves over to reflection. One of them reflects for a long time and intensely on Paul Morphy, and gratefully Caissa encourages him; and the greatest landmark in the history of chess is reached: Steinitz announces the principles of strategy, the result of inspired thought and imagination ... In order to distinguish between the true and the false principles, Steinitz had to dig deep to lay bare the roots of the art possessed by Morphy ...

'The reason for a plan's having no existence *a priori*, is that its existence is merely *asserted*, and to make such an assertion requires the boldness of genius. For this assertion implies that the position on the board must show a sign, a characteristic moment, which tells us what plan to follow and thus relieve us of the necessity of searching through an immense mass of variations ... The world did not comprehend how much Steinitz had given it; even chess players did not comprehend it. And yet his thought was revolutionary ... This fundamental and universal principle may be briefly expressed as follows: the basis of a masterly plan is always a valuation. To evaluate, to judge, to estimate a thing does not pretend to exact knowledge. But knowledge by estimate, by judgement, by evaluation, though not exact, according to the principle of Steinitz, is still an efficient guide for the master.'

Steinitz isolated a number of significant positional features and discovered that brilliant attacks are often successful only because of very weak defence. After sharply raising the art of defence, he, in the words of Euwe, ‘cast doubts on the widely-accepted, thanks to the victories of Morphy and Anderssen, axiom about the need to attack!’ And instead of this he put forward the concept of the *well-founded attack*, resulting from the continuous accumulation of small advantages.

His teaching became a turning point in chess history: it was from Steinitz that the era of modern chess began. The contribution of the first world champion to its development is comparable with the great scientific discoveries of the 19th century.

‘The Modern Calabrese’

Steinitz was born in a Prague ghetto, into the family of a tailor, in which he was child number nine; the next four all died in early childhood and he, the last remaining, maintained that he was the 13th all through his life. He learned chess by watching his father play. After finishing school in the mid-fifties, he continued his education in Vienna, which had ancient chess traditions (it is sufficient to recall the names of Allgaier, Hamppe and Falkbeer). When in London and Paris the fame of Morphy and Anderssen was at its height, in a small Vienna café a certain poor student was making a living by playing for stakes ...

Chess captivated Steinitz entirely. For the sake of it he gave up the higher polytechnic school, which promised the comfortable life of a qualified engineer, and soon he was the strongest player in Vienna. And when in 1862 an invitation arrived from London to the second international tournament, the Vienna Chess Society decided to send their 26-year-old champion to it.

Steinitz’s international debut was not bad: sixth prize out of 14 participants (all of five pounds sterling!), but the main thing was his memorable win over Mongrédien. The winner of the tournament, the legendary Adolf Anderssen, acknowledged it to be ‘the most bold and brilliant game’, and called Steinitz ‘a rising chess star’. In turn, the organisers called the game ‘the diamond of the Austrian champion’ and awarded it a special prize, as the most brilliant in the tournament.

Game 11

W.Steinitz-A.Mongrédien

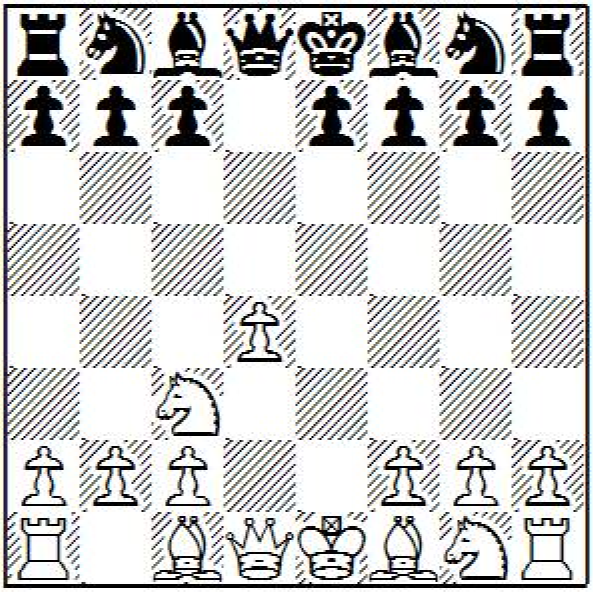
London 1862

Scandinavian Defence B01

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qd8?!

A move that is mentioned back in ancient manuscripts. More popular and natural is 3 ... Qa5 with definite counter-chances, as even occurred in the Kasparov-Anand match (New York 14th matchgame 1995).

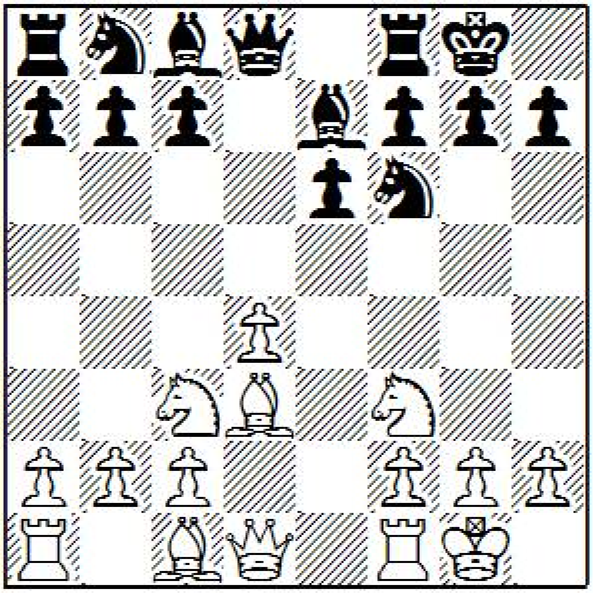
4 d4



4 ... e6 (after 4 ... Nf6 Fischer played 5 Bc4 Bf5 6 Qf3!, and after 4 ... g6 – 5 Bf4 Bg7 6 Qd2!) **5 Nf3 Nf6 6 Bd3 Be7 7 0-0**

7 Qe2 Nc6 8 Be3 Nb4 9 Bc4 Nbd5 is unclear.

7 ... 0-0



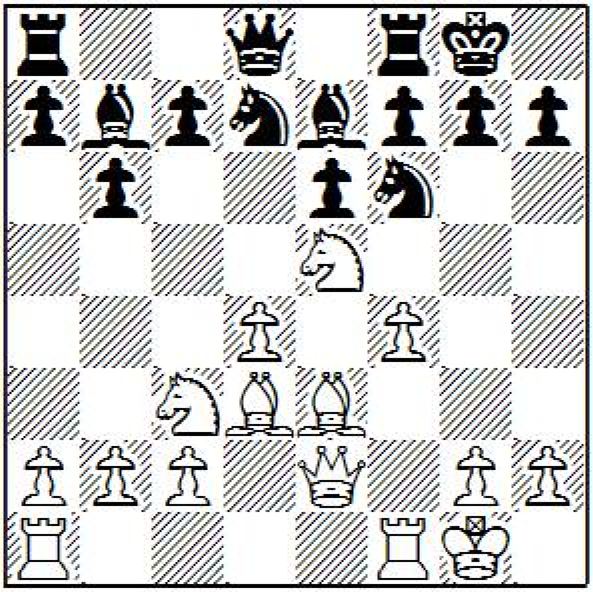
A ‘French’ type of position has arisen, but with an extra tempo for White. In Black’s justification it can be said that a similar position (with the bishop at c4) occurred in the game Alekhine-Schlechter (Carlsbad 1911).

8 Be3 (the alternative is 8 Qe2 Nc6 9 Rd1 Nb4 10 Bc4 Nbd5 11 Ne4 or 8 Ne5!? c5 9 dxc5) **8 ... b6**

Or 8 ... Nbd7 9 Ne5!

9 Ne5 Bb7 10 f4 Nbd7 (10 ... Nc6!?) **11 Qe2**

‘11 f5 came into consideration,’ writes Yakov Neishtadt in his book *The First World Champion* (1971). However, I am not sure that White has any advantage after 11 ... exf5 12 Rxf5 (12 Bxf5 Nxe5 13 dxe5 Nd5) 12 ... Nxe5 13 dxe5 Nd5 14 Nxd5 Qxd5 15 Qg4 g6.

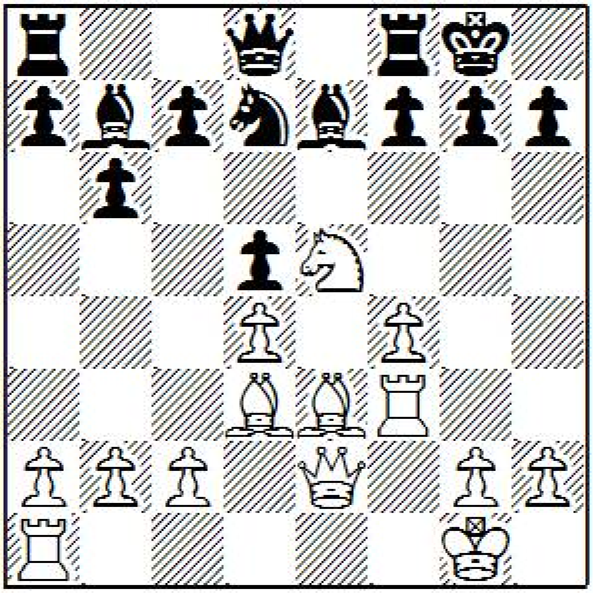


11 ... Nd5?! (11 ... c5 is more logical, although after 12 Rad1 White is a little better) **12 Nxd5 exd5**

If 12 ... Bxd5, not shutting in the bishop and controlling the f3-square, then 13 c4 Bb7 14 Rad1.

13 Rf3

With the classic threat of 14 Bxh7+ Kxh7 15 Rh3+ and Qh5. Neishtadt also considers 13 Qh5!? Nf6 14 Qh3 with the idea of 14 ... Bc8 15 f5!



13 ... f5!

Avoiding the rout that is possible after 13 ... Nxe5?! 14 fxe5 f6 15 Rh3 (15 ... g6 16 Rxh7!) or 13 ... Nf6?! 14 Rh3 (with the threat of g2-g4-g5) 14 ... Bc8 (14 ... Ne4 15 Bxe4 dxe4 16 Qh5 h6 17 Rg3! etc.) 15 f5 Bd6 16 Bg5! h6 17 Bh4 Re8 18 Bb5! Bxf5 19 Bxe8 Qxe8 20 Rf3 Bg4 21 Bxf6 Bxf3 22 Qxf3 gxf6 23 Ng4.

14 Rh3 (better is 14 Raf1!? with an enduring positional initiative) **14 ... g6**

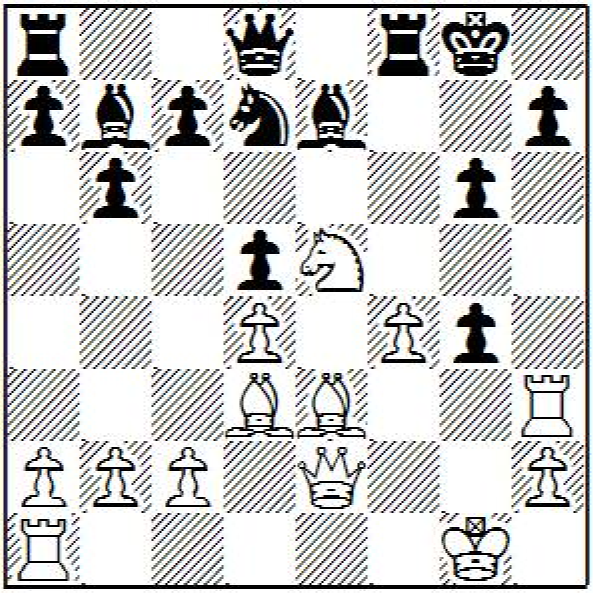
Parrying Qh5 and intending ... Nf6. Bad is 14 ... c5? (14 ... Qe8? 15 Bb5) 15 Qh5 Nf6 16 Qxf5 Bc8 17 Qxh7+! Nxh7 18 Bxh7+ Kh8 19 Ng6 mate.

15 g4?!

According to Lasker ‘vigorous and enterprising play’, but in my view debatable, to say the least.

15 ... fxg4?

Essential was the variation 15 ... Nxe5 16 fxe5 Bc8! (but not 16 ... fxg4? 17 Rxh7!, as in the game) 17 gxf5 Bxf5, and White has absolutely nothing! Now, however, the defence collapses.



16 Rxh7!?

The start of a bold combination, which brought Steinitz the brilliancy prize. But was the rook sacrifice correct? Did Black not have a better defence, or White a bloodless way to win?

After giving these questions to readers of the *Los Angeles Times* and *Welt am Sonntag*, which published extracts from the forthcoming book, I switched on my computer and began comparing my preliminary conclusions with the opinions of previous commentators of this game. My ‘iron friend’ Fritz, as always, caused surprise with its interesting variations, not reflected in chess literature. I think that even the great Steinitz himself did not suspect how many exciting adventures remained off-stage in this ‘hit’ game!

First, it transpired that the simple 16 Qxg4!, threatening sacrifices on g6 and h7, is decisive. After 16 ... Nf6? Neishtadt suggested 17 Qg2, and if 17 ... Bc8, then 18 Rxh7! Kxh7 19 Qxg6+ Kh8 20 Kh1, but more forcing is 17 Qe6+! Kg7 18 f5 Bc8 (18 ... h5 19 Nxg6 Rf7 20 Bh6+!) 19 Bh6+ Kh8 20 Nxg6+ hxg6 21 Bxf8+ Nh5 22 Rxh5+ gxh5 23 Qh6+ Kg8 24 Qg7 mate (Fritz).

Therefore there only remains 16 ... Nxe5. Now it is important not to be tempted by 17 Qe6+? Nf7? 18 Bxg6 Bh4 19 Qg4 hxg6 20 Qxg6+ Kh8 21 Kh1! (but not 21 Qh5+ Kg7 22 Rxh4 because of 22 ... Bc8 23 Kh1 Bf5

Fritz) 21 ... Rg8 22 Qxf7 Rg7 23 Qh5+ Rh7 24 Qe5+ Bf6 (24 ... Qf6 25 Rxh4!) 25 Rxh7+ Kxh7 26 Qf5+ Kg7 (or 26 ... Kh8 27 Qh3+ Bh4 28 Rg1 Bc8 29 Qg2 Qf8 30 Qg6) 27 Rg1+ Kf7 28 Qh7+ Ke6 29 f5+ Kd6 30 Rg6! Qe7 31 Rxf6+ Qxf6 32 Bf4+ Kc6 33 Qxc7+ Kb5 34 Qxb7 Qxd4 35 a4+! Ka5 36 Qxa8 and White wins. The surprising 17 ... Rf7!! refutes the bold queen sortie: 18 Bxg6 (the only chance: 18 fxe5? Bc8 or 18 Qxe5? Bf6 19 Qe6 Bc8) 18 ... hxg6 (18 ... Nxg6 19 Rxh7 is not so clear) 19 fxe5 Bc8 20 Qxg6+ Rg7, when the attack peters out and White is behind in material.

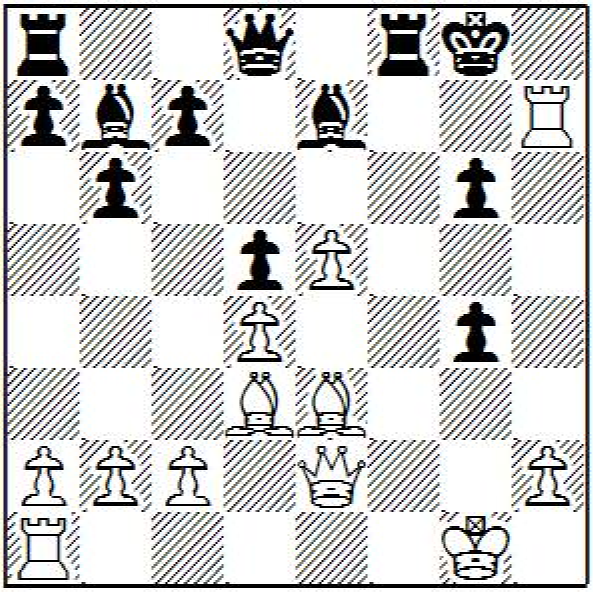
Correct is 17 dxe5! (but not 17 fxe5? Bc8! 18 e6 Rf6 and wins) with the threat of Bxg6, and Black has no defence: 17 ... Qc8 18 e6 Rf6 (18 ... Qe8 19 f5) 19 f5 Qf8 20 fxg6 hxg6 21 Bxg6 Qg7 22 Rg3 wins or 17 ... Bc8 18 e6 Rf6 19 f5 Qf8 (19 ... Bc5 20 Bxc5 bxc5 21 Re1 Qe8 22 fxg6 wins, while if 19 ... c5 there is both the modest 20 fxg6, and the extravagant 20 Rxh7 Kxh7 21 Qh3+ Kg8 22 fxg6 Rxg6+ 23 Bxg6 Bh4 24 Bf7+ Kh8 25 Qg4) 20 Bg5 Bc5+ 21 Kh1 Rxf5 (21 ... gxf5? 22 Bxf6+ fxg4 23 Bxh7 mate) 22 Bh6 Qf6 23 Bxf5 Qxf5 24 Qxf5 gxf5 25 Rg3+ Kh8 26 e7 etc.

Second, it was confirmed that the rook sacrifice also wins, although this is a more thorny path to the goal.

16 ... Nxe5

Or 16 ... Kxh7 17 Qxg4, and 17 ... Nxe5 18 fxe5 has to be played, since 17 ... Nf6? is bad: 18 Qxg6+ Kh8 19 Qh6+ Kg8 20 Kh1! and wins.

17 fxe5

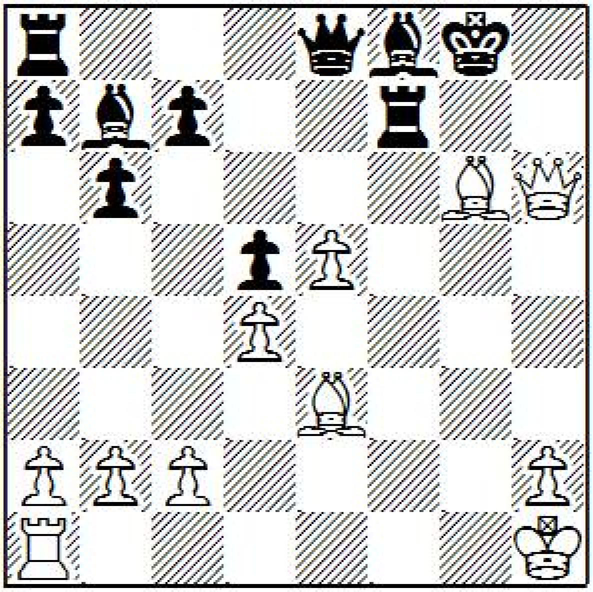


17 ... Kxh7

After the desperate 17 ... Bg5?! (17 ... Ba6?! 18 Rh6!) there is a pleasant choice between 18 Bxg5 Qxg5 19 Rxc7 g3 (or 19 ... Bc8 20 Kh1) 20 hxg3! (20 Rxb7? Rf2) 20 ... Qxg3+ 21 Qg2 Qe3+ 22 Kh1 Qh6+ 23 Qh2 and 18 Bxg6 Rf3 (incidentally, 17 ... Rf3 18 Bxg6 Bg5 would have come to the same thing) 19 Bf2! (but not 19 Bxg5? Qxg5 20 Rxc7 Qxg6 21 Rxb7 Raf8 22 Qg2 Qe4 and ... Qf4 with sufficient counterplay) 19 ... Bf4 20 Bh4 Bg5 21 Qg2!! Bc8 22 Rf1!, and in both cases White is in charge.

18 Qxg4 Rg8?

This loses without any questions, as does 18 ... Rf5? – after 19 Bxf5 gxf5 20 Qxf5+ Kg7 (20 ... Kh8 21 Qh5+) 21 Kh1! the black king is finished off by a check from g1. But the best defence 18 ... Qe8! would have forced White to play very accurately: 19 Qh5+ Kg7! (not 19 ... Kg8 20 Bxg6 Rf7 21 Kh1 Bf8 22 Rg1 Bg7 23 Bh6! and wins) 20 Qh6+ Kg8 21 Bxg6 Rf7 22 Kh1! Bf8.



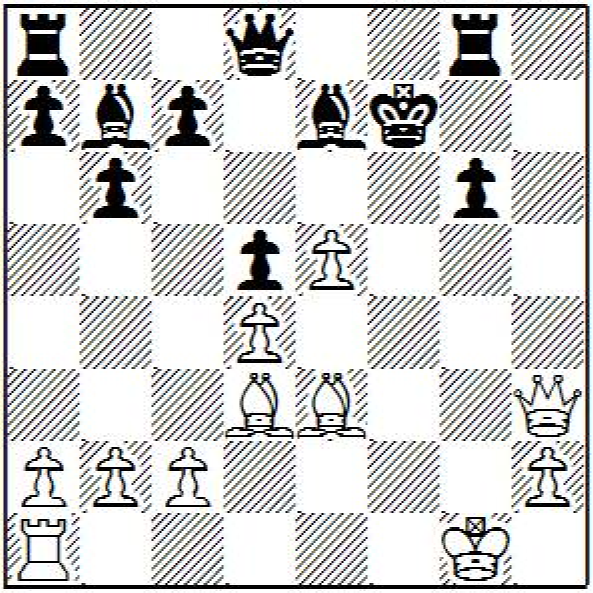
Analysis diagram

Here the readers of the aforementioned newspapers together with the computer discovered two attractive possibilities:

1) 23 Bxf7+ Qxf7 24 Rg1+ Bg7 25 Qf6! Re8 26 Bh6 Qxf6 27 exf6 Re1! 28 Rxe1! (after 28 Bxg7 Rxg1+ 29 Kxg1 Kf7 30 Kf2 Bc8 31 Ke3 Bf5 32 c3 Ke6 the endgame is not so clear: the bishop at g7 is passive, and only a special analysis can establish whether or not the white king will break through on the queenside) 28 ... Bxh6 29 Re7 Bf4 30 h4 – Black is not able to coordinate the actions of his bishops, and the white king comes into play with decisive effect.

2) 23 Qh5, and Black has no defence: 23 ... Qd7 (or 23 ... Qe6) 24 Rg1 Bg7 25 Qh7+! Kf8 26 Bxf7 Qxf7 27 Rxg7 Qf1+ 28 Rg1 Qf3+ 29 Rg2 Qf1+ 30 Bg1, or 23 ... Bg7!? 24 Rg1! (24 Qh7+ Kf8 25 Bh6 gives only perpetual check: 25 ... Bxh6! 26 Qxh6+ Ke7 27 Qg5+ Kf8) 24 ... Kf8 25 Rg3!! (the only move; after 25 Bxf7 Qxf7 26 Rg6 Qf1+ 27 Rg1 Qf7 Black saves the game) 25 ... Rf1+ 25 Kg2 and wins (Fritz).

19 Qh5+ Kg7 20 Qh6+ (of course, not 20 Qxg6+? Kh8!) **20 ... Kf7 21 Qh7+ Ke6** (21 ... Rg7 22 Bxg6+ Kf8 23 Qh8+ Rg8 24 Bh6 mate) **22 Qh3+! Kf7**



23 Rf1+

23 e6+ would have also concluded the pursuit of the king, forcing mate in another eight moves.

23 ... Ke8 24 Qe6 Rg7 25 Bg5 (dual solutions – 25 Bb5+ and 25 Bh6!) **25 ... Qd7**

Or 25 ... Bc8 26 Qc6+ Bd7 27 Qxg6+ Rxg6 28 Bxg6 mate.

26 Bxg6+ Rxg6 (26 ... Kd8 27 Rf8+ and mate) **27 Qxg6+ Kd8 28 Rf8+ Qe8 29 Qxe8 mate**

‘Games that were deemed brilliant in recent international tournaments were no match for this one,’ declared Chigorin in 1890.

After the tournament Steinitz settled in London, one of the chess capitals of the world, and quickly won over the public with his aggressive, uncompromising play. The elderly English master Walker even called him ‘the modern Calabrese’ (this was how Greco had been called long ago – as coming from Calabria). Yes, the early Steinitz was a fervent supporter of Anderssen and looked a worthy successor to him, playing in the good old combinative style ...

In matches played in 1863 he crushed the young Joseph Blackburne (+7 -1 =2), the Belgian-born Frederick Deacon (+5 -1 =1) and Valentine Green (+7 =2). During this period he also won an instructive game against Augustus Mongrédien – incidentally, Morphy’s last proper match opponent.

Game 12

W.Steinitz-A.Mongrédien

London 1863

Double Fianchetto B06

1 e4 g6 2 d4 Bg7 3 c3

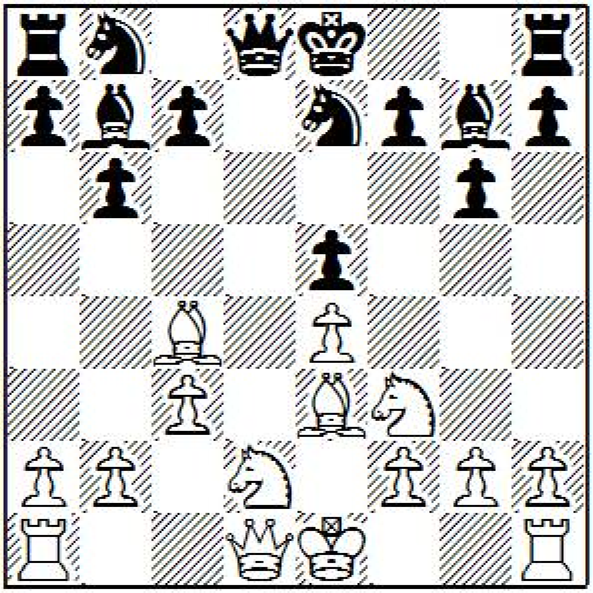
‘Typical of Steinitz: more than anything he is careful not to end up with weak pawns in the centre.’ (Euwe)

3 ... b6 4 Be3 Bb7 5 Nd2 d6 6 Ngf3 (White is not tempted by the committal 6 f4)

6 ... e5?!

Much sounder was 7 ... Nd7, and if 8 a4, then 8 ... a6, in the spirit of a game from ... the Petrosian-Spassky match (Moscow 16th matchgame 1966).

7 dxe5! (shutting in the bishop at g7) **7 ... dxe5 8 Bc4 Ne7?** (8 ... Qe7 was essential)

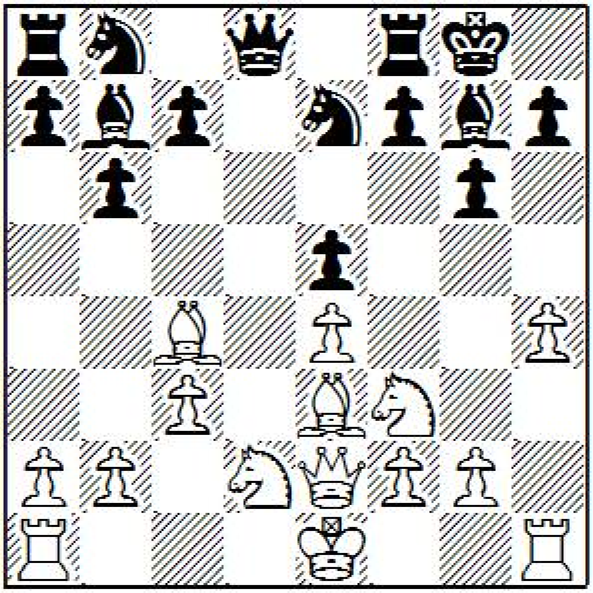


9 Qe2?!

The commentators missed the typical sacrifice 9 Bxf7+!, which immediately gives a decisive advantage: 9 ... Kxf7 10 Qb3+ Nd5 (10 ... Ke8 11 Ng5) 11 Nc4 Re8 12 0-0-0 c6 13 Na5 (computer play!). Why didn’t Steinitz play this? I think that he *thought schematically*, and back on the seventh move he had *prepared a plan*.

9 ... 0-0 10 h4!

A classic flank attack with a secure centre (the same theme will be seen in a game with Chigorin – *Game No.25*). 10 0-0-0 Nd7 11 h4 is inaccurate in view of 11 ... Nf6.

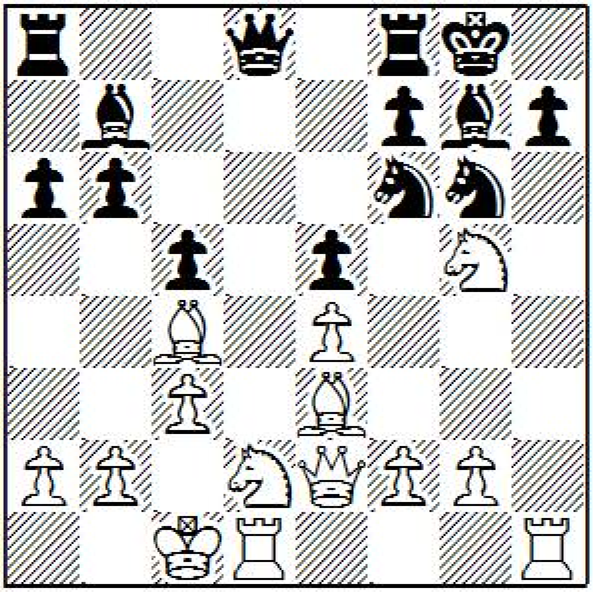


10 ... Nd7 (if 10 ... h5, then 11 Ng5) **11 h5 c5 12 hxg6 Nxg6**

An ugly move, but after 12 ... hxg6 13 Ng5 Nf6 14 0-0-0 Qc7 Black also has a bad position, for example: 15 Ndf3 (also good is 15 Rh4 Nc6 16 Rdh1 Na5 17 f3 Nxc4 18 Nxc4 Rfd8 19 g4 Kf8 20 Qh2 Ng8 21 Rh7) 15 ... Nc6 16 Nxf7 Rxf7 17 Ng5 Raf8 18 Bxf7+ Rxf7 19 Qc4 Na5 20 Rd8+ Bf8 21 Qe6! Qe7 22 Rxf8+ Kxf8 23 Rh8+ Kg7 24 Qh3 and wins.

13 0-0-0 a6?! (13 ... Nf6) **14 Ng5 Nf6**

Not 14 ... h6 because of 15 Nxf7 Rxf7 16 Qg4 etc.



15 Nxh7!

Strictly according to his own teaching: a combination as the fruits of a positional advantage.

15 ... Nxh7 16 Rxh7!?

‘The right way! 16 Qh5 also gave an advantage, but not a decisive one: 16 ... Nf6 17 Qxg6 Qc8 and then ... Qg4.’ (Euwe) Naïve expectations: here White wins by both the quiet 18 Rh4 and Rdh1, and also the spectacular 18 Rh7!! Nxh7 19 Bh6 forcing mate.

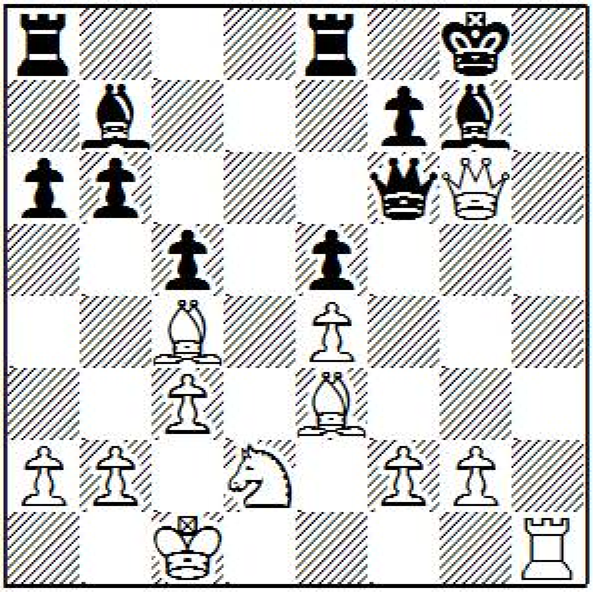
16 ... Kxh7

After the interposition of 16 ... b5 White decides matters by 17 Rdh1 (or 17 Qh5 immediately) 17 ... bxc4 18 Qh5 Re8 19 Rxg7+ Kxg7 20 Qh6+ Kg8 21 Qh7+ (21 Bxc5 Re7 22 Nxc4 is also good) 21 ... Kf8 22 Bh6+ Ke7 23 Bg5+.

17 Qh5+ Kg8 18 Rh1

Also possible is 18 Qxg6 Qf6 19 Qh5 b5 20 Rh1 Rfc8 21 Bg5!

18 ... Re8 19 Qxg6 Qf6



20 Bxf7+! Qxf7 (or 20 ... Kf8 21 Bxe8 Rxe8 22 Rh8+ Bxh8 23 Bh6+ Ke7 24 Bg5) **21 Rh8+ Kxh8 22 Qxf7** and White won

‘The aggressive and inventive style of the Steinitz who had been raised in the German school of combination pleased the English amateurs, for they were able to learn a great deal from him just as, conversely, Steinitz did from their more solid play,’ writes Lasker. ‘From the imaginative, heroic temper of Anderssen’s combinative style, the large-visioned, systematic position-play of the English School a synthesis arose in the mind of Steinitz, which was destined to make history ... I fancy that one day he reflected how it could have come about that the magician Morphy beat the magician Anderssen. That a magician wins is obvious, but how can a magician lose? Also, how could a magician not lose if two magicians fight. Therefore, I fancy, Steinitz, by slow degrees, was led to believe that chess, after all, must be subject to a reason of its own not to be affected by invention, intuition, inspiration, genius, or anything else of the kind ... Surely, Steinitz’s heart beat when for the first time the thought came to him that the master should not look for winning combinations, unless he believed, unless he could prove to himself that he held an advantage ... ’

Bloodbath Number Four

Steinitz's striking match successes induced the English to organise his encounter with Anderssen, which can fully be regarded as the fourth in history, after the duels La Bourdonnais-McDonnell, Staunton-Saint-Amant and Morphy-Anderssen, to resemble a match for the world championship. And indeed, if ratings had existed then, the first six in the world rating list on 1 July 1866 would have looked like this: 1. Morphy, 2. Anderssen, 3. Paulsen (2nd prize-winner, London 1862), 4. Steinitz, 5. Kolisch, 6. Löwenthal. But since hopes of Morphy returning had died, any big match involving Anderssen effectively became a battle for the crown (roughly like the 1974 final candidates match Karpov-Korchnoi).

Play was to the first to win eight games, draws not counting (and there weren't any – not a single one!). Finally a time control appeared: two hours for every 20 moves. By present-day standards the prize fund was more than modest: 100 pounds sterling to the winner, and 20 to the loser. Curiously, for being late for play by more than 15 minutes a penalty of one guinea was imposed ...

Staunton regarded Anderssen as the favourite and he wrote that 'Steinitz clearly overestimated his strength.' However, this was a fierce and dramatic battle between two worthy opponents, two fearless chess buccaneers. Anderssen began with his favourite Evans Gambit and opened the score: 1-0. Steinitz replied with the even more audacious Salvio Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3 g5 4 Bc4 g4 5 Ne5 Qh4+ 6 Kf1 Nh6 7 d4), and levelled the score: 1-1. Then Anderssen suddenly began to 'drift', losing twice with White in the Evans and again with Black in the Salvio. The score became 4-1 in Steinitz's favour!

In the sixth game Anderssen remembered about the Sicilian Defence and after 1 e4 c5 2 g3 Nc6 3 Bg2 e5 he won in a protracted struggle (which also occurred in the 12th). Greatly heartened, the 48-year-old German master scored a further three successive wins: twice with White in the Evans Gambit and finally with Black in the Salvio Gambit! And he again took the lead: 5-4. But Steinitz promptly gained his revenge in both gambits: 6-5! Then Anderssen again employed the Sicilian: 6-6.

Up till this point, as the commentators remarked, Steinitz was more like Anderssen than Anderssen himself! But in the 13th game his play clearly shows features of the future positional school.

Game 13

A.Anderssen-W.Steinitz

Match, London 1866, 13th game

Ruy Lopez C65

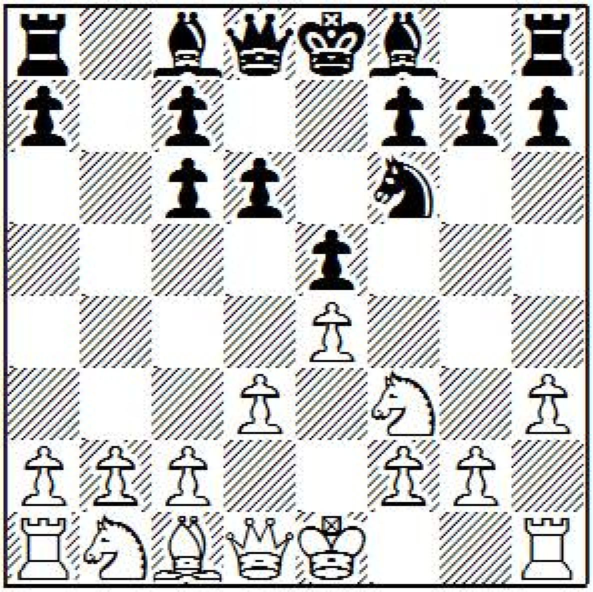
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 (refraining, for the first time in the match, from 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4!?) **3 ... Nf6 4 d3 d6 5 Bxc6+?!**

This exchange is good in connection with d2-d4, but here 5 c3 is better.

5 ... bxc6 6 h3

‘Loss of time incurred in order to prevent ... Bg4. Anderssen seems to have considered the knight stronger than the bishop, a valuation for which no motive can be adduced. The pawn move weakens the phalanx of the white kingside pawns as will be explained shortly. Perhaps this game was the historical event which caused Steinitz to conceive his theory of the phalanx.’ (Lasker)

I should mention that the plan with Bxc6 and h2-h3 is more justified in the Sicilian Defence (1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 g6 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 d3 Bg7 6 h3) and, with colours reversed, in the English Opening – there the arrangement of the pawns is different and it is important to retain the knight at f3 (f6).



6 ... g6!

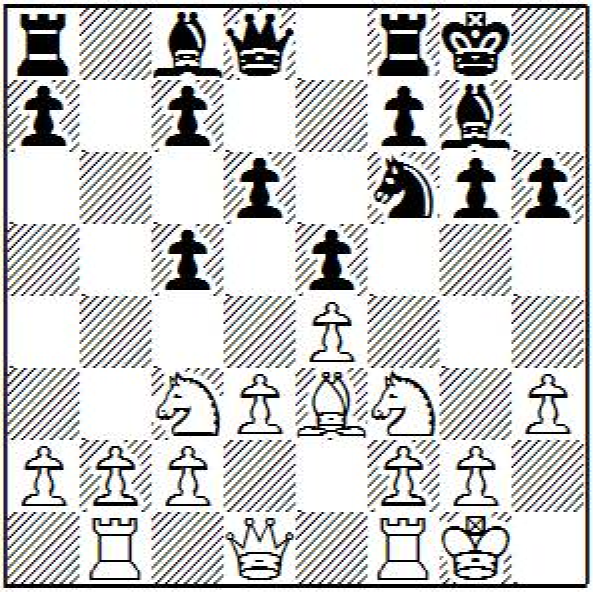
‘Preparation for an assault by a mass of pawns as taught by Philidor. For this purpose it is essential to maintain many obstructions in the centre. The bishop which aides the centre from g7 is there well placed.’ (Lasker)

7 Nc3 Bg7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Bg5?!

A new, but unsuccessful move. The two players obviously remembered the Anderssen-Paulsen match (London 1862), the fifth game of which went 9 Ne2 c5 10 Ng3 Bb7 11 b3 (in the seventh game White preferred 11 Re1 Nd7?! 12 Rb1 f5 13 b4) 11 ... Ne8 12 Rb1 Qe7 13 Re1 f5 14 b4 cxb4 15 Rxb4 c5 16 Rb1 f4 17 Nf1 Bc8 18 c3 Qf6 19 d4 with a protracted and double-edged struggle.

9 ... h6 10 Be3 c5 (solidifying the centre) **11 Rb1**

Anderssen remains true to an approved plan. After 11 a3 Black has the reply 11 ... a5, or 11 Nh2 Nh5 12 Qd2 Kh7, and if 13 g4, then 13 ... Nf4 14 Bxf4 exf4 15 Qxf4 f5 with excellent play for the pawn. Lasker suggested 11 Qd2 Kh7 12 g4?!, but after 12 ... Ng8! and ... f7-f5 White runs into difficulties.

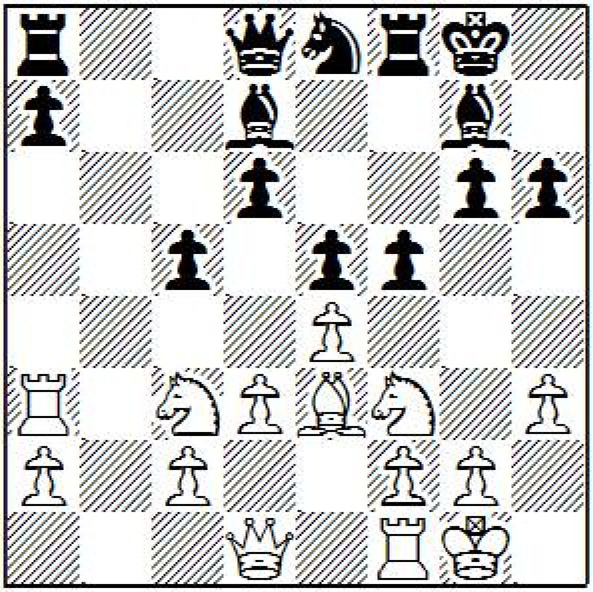


11 ... Ne8! (making way for the f-pawn) **12 b4 cxb4 13 Rxb4 c5 14 Ra4**

A dangerous rook journey; 14 Rb2 f5 15 Nd5 Nf6 etc. was a quieter alternative.

14 ... Bd7 15 Ra3 f5

‘The phalanx marches.’ (Lasker)

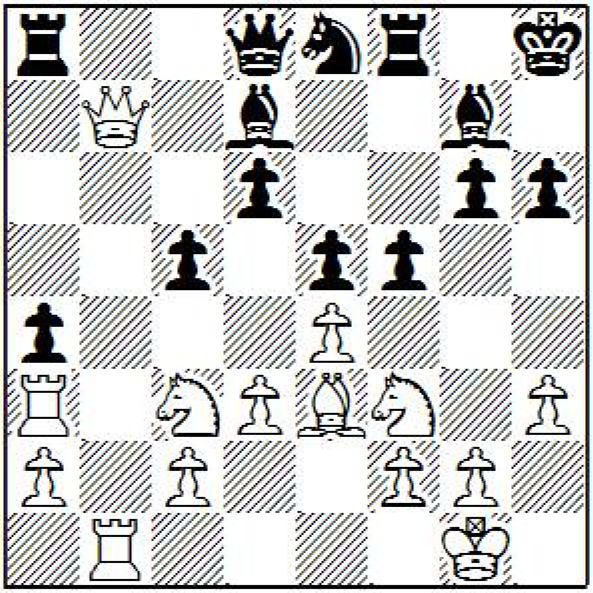


16 Qb1?! (16 Nd5 is correct, and if 16 ... f4 17 Bd2 g5, then 18 Nh2) **16 ... Kh8?!**

The commentators were perplexed as to why Steinitz avoided winning a pawn – 16 ... fxe4!? 17 Nxe4 (17 dxe4 Bxh3) 17 ... Bxh3. Neishtadt suggested that in the event of 18 Qb3+ Kh8 (inferior is 18 ... c4?! 19 dxc4 Rxf3 20 gxf3 Bxf1 21 Kxf1) 19 Qb7?! 'things are not so simple', but after 19 ... Rxf3! the computer does not see any compensation for the material deficit. Evidently better is 19 Nxe5 (but not 19 Nfg5?! c4! 20 Qb7 Bd7) 19 ... Bxe5 20 gxh3 Qc8 21 Kg2 (21 d4?! c4 22 Qc3 Bg7) with hopes of equalising.

But if Black really didn't want to allow his opponent counter-chances, 16 ... Nc7 was more logical, since 17 Qb7? is not possible on account of 17 ... Rb8 18 Qxa7 Ra8.

17 Qb7 a5 18 Rb1 (18 Rb3!?) **18 ... a4**



19 Qd5?!

White sounds the retreat. 19 Nd5 was more consistent, for example:

1) 19 ... fxe4?! 20 dxe4 Bxh3?, and here Neishtadt recommended 21 gxh3 Rxf3 22 Bxc5, although the spectacular inclusion of the a3-rook is much stronger after 21 Bg5! hxg5 (21 ... Qc8 22 Nh4!) 22 Nxe5! (with the threats of Nxg6+ and Rxh3+) 22 ... Be6 23 Nxg6+ Kg8 24 Nde7+ Kf7 25 Nxf8 Kxf8 26 Nc6 Qc8 27 Rf3+ Bf6 28 Qe7+;

2) 19 ... Nf6 (seemingly the most natural) 20 Bxc5!? (in the style of the ‘old’ Anderssen!) 20 ... Nxd5 (20 ... dxc5 21 Nxe5 Be8 22 Nf4!) 21 Bxd6 fxe4 22 dxe4 Nf4 23 Nxe5 Be6 24 Bxf8 Qxf8 25 Nd3 with sharp play;

3) 19 ... Be6 20 Ne7 Kh7 21 Nc6 (but not 21 Nh4?! f4 22 Bd2 Rf7 23 Nhxg6 Nc7) 21 ... Qc8 22 Na7, and since 22 ... Qxb7 23 Rxb7 fxe4 24 dxe4 Nf6 25 Nd2 is unfavourable for Black, he has to play 22 ... Qd8 with equal chances.

19 ... Qc8 20 Rb6 Ra7 21 Kh2

Everyone considered this prophylactic move to be a serious mistake. They recommended 21 exf5 (incorrect is 21 Rxd6? Nxd6 22 Qxd6 f4) 21 ... gxf5 22 Bd2 with the idea of 22 ... Rg8 (22 ... f4 23 Nh2!) 23 Qc4 f4 24 Nb5, but after 22 ... Qc7! White’s position is worse. Apparently if 21 Qc4!? Anderssen was afraid of the attack 21 ... f4 (21 ... Be6 22 Nd5) 22 Bd2 Bxh3!? 23 gxh3 Qxh3, although after 24 Ne1 f3 25 Nd5 Black has no more than a draw.

21 ... f4 22 Bd2 g5 23 Qc4 Qd8 24 Rb1?

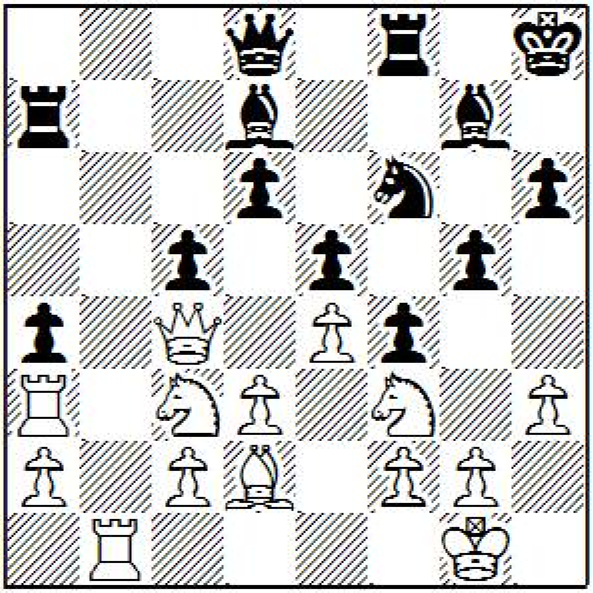
But this really is a mistake. 24 Nd5! was much more energetic, with possibilities of active counterplay: 24 ... h5 25 Ra6! Rxa6 26 Qxa6 g4 27 Ba5! (diverting the queen) 27 ... Qb8 28 Nh4 Kh7 29 Qb6 (29 Nb6 Be6) 29 ... Qa8 30 Qd8.

24 ... Nf6?!

If 24 ... h5 the paradoxical 25 h4! gxh4 26 Nb5 Ra6 27 Nc3 Nc7 28 Nd5 is unclear. However, it was worth covering the b5-square by 24 ... Nc7! – after this it is hard for White to do anything to oppose the imminent storming of his king’s fortress.

25 Kg1?!

Of course, not 25 Nxa4? Qe8 (or 25 ... Qe7 and ... Rfa8), but after 25 Nb5! there would still have been all to play for.



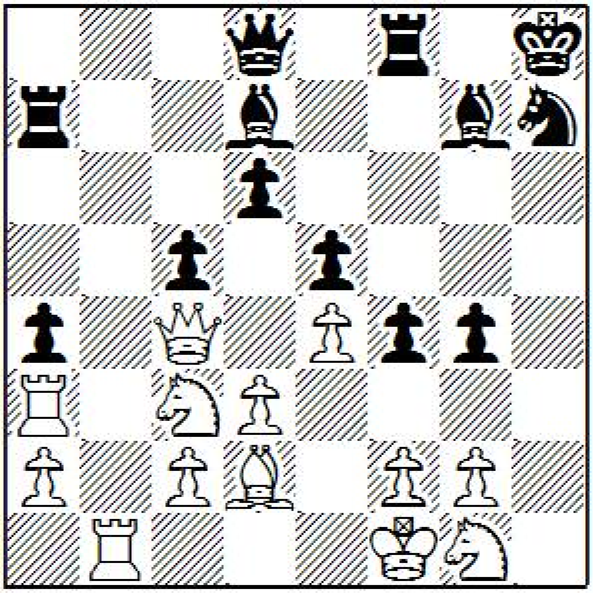
25 ... Nh7

‘The g-pawn having been protected, the phalanx can set itself into motion.’ (Lasker)

26 Kf1 (26 Nb5!? Qb8 27 Nc3) **26 ... h5 27 Ng1?**

Probably the decisive error. After 27 Nb5! nothing terrible for White is apparent: 27 ... Ra6 28 Nc7 Ra7 29 Ne6 etc.

27 ... g4 28 hxg4 hxg4



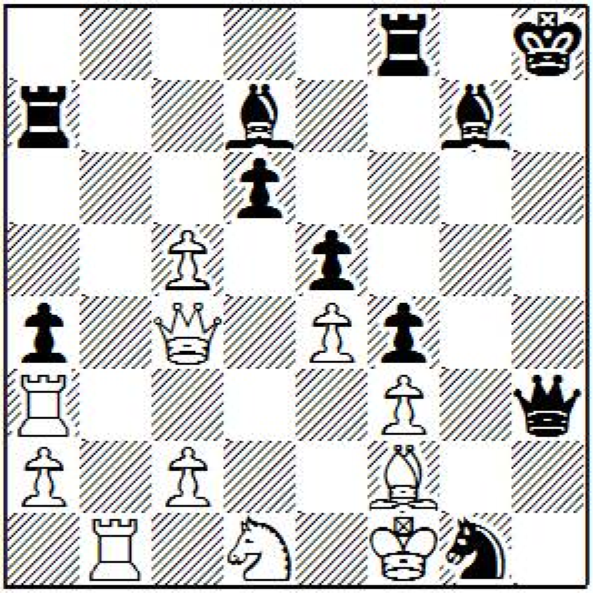
29 f3? (this merely strengthens the enemy attack) **29 ... Qh4 30 Nd1 Ng5**

‘The pieces post themselves behind the phalanx menacingly. Soon the lines will be opened, which will allow the major pieces to approach the white king (Lasker).’ Virtually a model of the modern King’s Indian Defence!

31 Be1 Qh7 32 d4 (desperation!) **32 ... gxf3 33 gxf3 Nh3!?** (33 ... cxd4 was a more prosaic way to win) **34 Bf2**

Or 34 dxc5 Nxg1 35 Kxg1 Qg6+ 36 Kf2 Bh3 37 Bb4 dxc5 38 Bxc5 Rc7 and wins.

34 ... Nxg1 35 dxc5 Qh3+



36 Ke1 (36 Kxg1? Rg8) **36 ... Nxf3+ 37 Rxf3 Qxf3 38 Nc3 dxc5 39 Bxc5 Rc7 40 Nd5 Rxc5 41 Qxc5 Qxe4+ 42 Kf2 Rc8 43 Nc7 Qe3+ 0-1**

'One recognizes in the above game a trend in the style of Steinitz towards Philidor and away from La Bourdonnais. The theory of Steinitz approached that of Philidor as soon as he examined the minute advantages that *endure* ... . Small disadvantages appertaining to the position of pawns are difficult to repair and have a tendency to last.' (Lasker)

Declining the King's Gambit did not help Anderssen in the 14th game, and this 'bloody' match ended with a score of 8-6 in Steinitz's favour.

However, the chess world was not in a hurry to recognise him as champion. Firstly, the undefeated Morphy was still alive. When in the autumn of 1866 Steinitz won with difficulty a match against Henry Bird (+7 -5 =5), the latter remarked that Morphy (who had smashed Bird by a score of +10 -1 =1) would be able to give the 'modern Calabrese' odds of a pawn and move! Such a comment is not forgotten: afterwards Steinitz crushed Bird every time for many years ...

Secondly, Steinitz was not able to demonstrate his superiority in the next few tournaments: in Paris 1867 he was third after Kolisch and Winawer, in Dundee he was second after Neumann, and in Baden-Baden 1870 he was second after Anderssen, to whom he lost both games.

The Birth of a New School

At that time the future world champion invented an ultra-sharp opening, which became known in theory as the ‘Steinitz Gambit’. In it were oddly interwoven both the attacking ideas of the masters of the old school, who often left their king in the centre, and the first dawning of the future new school. Steinitz put forward an original thesis (true, as it later transpired, it did not hold for all positions, by any means): ‘If necessary precautionary measures are taken, the king can defend itself ... For an attack the opponent has to advance his pawns, and in the event of an unsuccessful offensive the pawns will prove weak.’

Of the many games played by Steinitz with his gambit, the most complete impression is made by the following – with Louis Paulsen, one of the leading masters of that era, who Steinitz rated highly and belonged to the ‘pioneers of the modern school’. In this game he convincingly demonstrated his superiority in the evaluation of positional factors – both temporary and long-term.

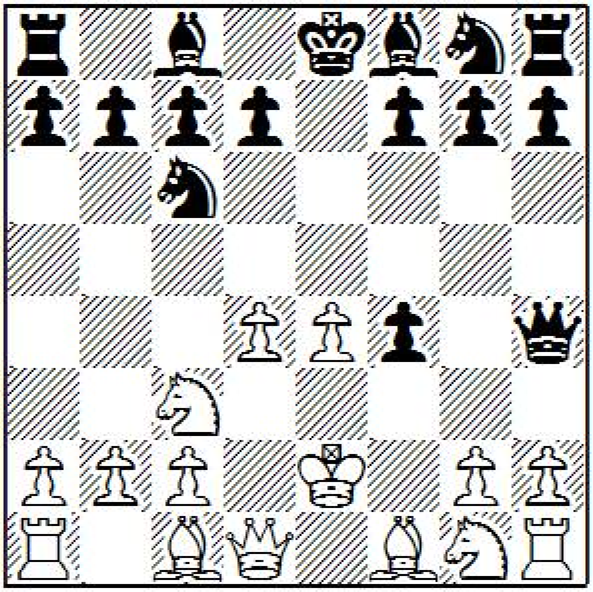
Game 14

W.Steinitz-L.Paulsen

Baden-Baden 1870

Vienna Game C25

1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 f4 exf4 4 d4?! Qh4+ 5 Ke2



Such boldness by the king is a nonsense in modern-day chess. The idea of this audacious gambit was evoked by a game with Hamppe (Vienna 1859): 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 f4 d5 4 exd5 Nxd5 5 fxe5 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Qh4+ 7 Ke2 Bg4+ 8 Nf3 Nc6 9 d4 0-0-0 with advantage to Black – Steinitz.

Since the king interferes with the development of its own pieces, it would seem that Black should automatically obtain a good game. However, Steinitz thought that in the given position long-term factors were more important than temporary inconveniences. White's plan is to drive back the queen with gain of tempo and to prepare an attack under the cover of his strong pawn centre, at the same hindering Black's harmonious development. The first world champion's contemporaries were not in fact able to find a prescription against his revolutionary strategy of accumulating small advantages, and it was only much later that doubts were cast on this gambit.

When in 1883 Morphy was informed that Steinitz was in New Orleans, he is said to have replied: 'I know ... His gambit is bad.' The great chess recluse was not let down by his intuition! But to disclose the vulnerability of the white king in the centre and to refute the gambit, it was precisely Morphy's genius that was lacking. Perhaps in this there was some historical chess sense – the elemental pioneer had departed, making way for the philosopher: the time had come to formulate new principles ...

5 ... d6

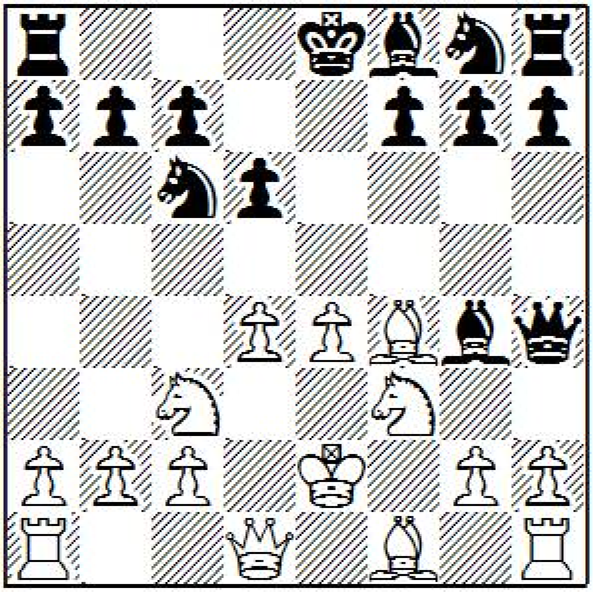
The most solid. In Steinitz's games there also occurred both 5 ... Qh5+ 6 Nf3 g5 7 Nd5!, and 5 ... b6 6 Nb5 (according to Chigorin, 6 Qd2! Ba6+ 7 Kd1 Bxf1 8 Nf3 Qh5 9 Rxf1 is better) 6 ... Ba6 7 a4, and also 5 ... Nf6 6 Nf3 Qg4 7 d5 Ne5 8 h3 Qh5 9 Bxf4 Nxf3 10 gxf3 d6 11 Kd2 Qh4 12 Be3 with advantage to White (Chigorin-Steinitz, Havana 21st matchgame 1892).

The central counter 5 ... d5!? is met by 6 exd5 which leads to wild complications, for example:

1) 6 ... Qe7+ 7 Kf2 Qh4+ 8 g3! fxg3+ 9 Kg2 Bd6 10 Qe1+! Nce7 11 hxg3 Qxd4 (Steinitz-Chigorin, London 1883) 12 Nf3! with advantage, or 9 ... Nxd4? (an unsuccessful novelty: Black suddenly finds himself behind in development) 10 hxg3 Qg4 11 Qe1+ Be7 12 Bd3 (threatening 13 Rh4) 12 ... Nf5 (12 ... Kd8 13 Ne4) 13 Nf3 Bd7 14 Bf4 f6 15 Ne4 Ngh6 16 Bxh6 Nxh6 17 Rxh6 gxh6 18 Nxf6+ Kf7 19 Nxg4 and White won (Steinitz-Zukertort, USA 20th matchgame 1886) – this win brought Steinitz the official title of world champion!

2) 6 ... Bg4+!? 7 Nf3 0-0-0 (7 ... Bxf3+!? 8 gxf3 Qe7+) 8 dxc6 Bc5 9 cxb7+ (9 Qe1!? Qh5! 10 cxb7+ Kb8 Steinitz-Liverpool Chess Club 1898/99) 9 ... Kb8 10 Nb5 Nf6 11 Kd3 Qh5 (11 ... Bf5+ 12 Kc3 Ne4+ 13 Kb3 Qf6 14 Qe1 is unclear) 12 Kc3 Bxd4+? (12 ... a6! is correct) 13 Nbxd4 Qc5+ 14 Kb3 Qb6+ 15 Bb5 Bxf3 16 Qxf3 Rxd4 17 Qc6 Qa5 18 c3 and White won (Steinitz-Zukertort, London match 1872).

6 Nf3 Bg4 7 Bxf4



7 ... 0-0-0

The stem game Steinitz-Neumann (Dundee 1867) went 7 ... Bxf3+ 8 Kxf3 Nge7 (8 ... Nf6 9 Bb5!; 8 ... g5!?) 9 Be2 0-0-0 10 Be3 Qf6+ 11 Kg3 d5 12 Bg4+ Kb8 13 e5 Qg6 14 Kf2 h5 15 Bh3! f6 16 exf6 Qxf6+ 17 Qf3 Qxf3+ 18 gxf3! g6 19 Ne2! Nf5?! 20 Bxf5 gxf5 21 c3 Bd6 22 Bf4! and White won.

In Baden-Baden against Rosenthal, Steinitz tried the tempting 8 gxf3?! Qxf4 9 Nd5, and after 9 ... Qh6? (correct was 9 ... Qh4! 10 Nxc7+ Kd8 11 Nxa8 Kc8 12 d5 Ne5 13 Qd4 Kb8 and if 14 Qc3 Qd8!) 10 Nxc7+ Kd8 11 Nxa8 Kc8 12 d5 Nf6 (12 ... Ne5 13 Qd4 Kb8 14 Qc3!, and the knight at a8 is rescued) 13 dxc6 d5 14 Qd4 Bd6 15 Qxa7 bxc6 16 Re1 Re8 17 Kd1! dxe4 18 Rxe4! Rxe4 (18 ... Nxe4? 19 Nb6+ and Qd7 mate) 19 fxe4 Qf4 20 Bh3+ Kd8 21 Rf1 Qxe4 22 Qb6+ Ke8 23 Re1 and Black resigned.

Perhaps the most logical is 7 ... f5! (E. Schmidt, 1895), for example:

1) 8 exf5 (no better is 8 Nd5 0-0-0, or 8 h3 fxe4! 9 Nxe4 Qe7 10 hxg4 Qxe4+ 11 Be3 Nf6) 8 ... 0-0-0 9 Bg3 Bxf3+ 10 Kxf3 Nxd4+ 11 Kf2 Qf6;

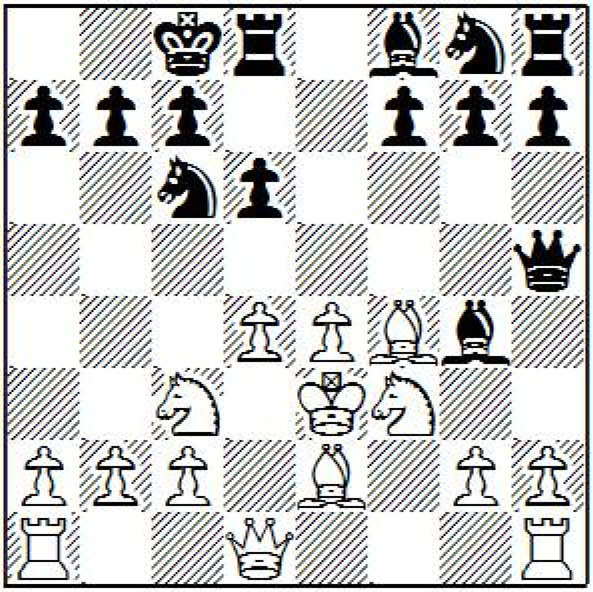
2) 8 d5 Ne5 9 Bxe5 dxe5 10 g3 Qh5 11 Bg2 Nf6!, or 9 Ke3 Bxf3 10 gxf3 g5! 11 Bxe5 dxe5 12 Qd3 Bc5+;

3) 8 e5 Bxf3+ 9 Kxf3 Qg4+ 10 Ke3 dxe5! 11 Qxg4 (11 Bxe5? Nxe5 12 dxe5 Bc5+) 11 ... exd4+ 12 Kd3 fxg4;

4) 8 Ke3 Qe7 (8 ... Bxf3!? 9 Kxf3 g5) 9 Bd3 Nf6 10 Bg5 0-0-0;

5) 8 Qd2 Nf6 9 exf5 0-0-0 10 g3 Qh5 11 Bg2 d5 12 h3 Bxf5 13 g4 Qg6 14 Nh4 Qe8+ 15 Kf2 Be4 – as in all the preceding variations, Black has an excellent game (Averbakh-Trifunovic, USSR-Yugoslavia match 1963).

8 Ke3 Qh5 (8 ... Bxf3 9 Qxf3 f5 10 d5 Nce7 11 Kd2 fxe4 12 Nxe4 favours White, Steinitz-Winawer, London 1883, but 8 ... Qe7!? 9 Kf2 f5 10 exf5 Qd7 is interesting) **9 Be2**



9 ... Qa5?

Fearing 10 h3, Black loses a highly important tempo. The modern ways of playing this position are the standard 9 ... f5 10 h3 (10 Ng5?! Nf6 11 Kd3 fxe4+ Caldwell-Bisguier, New York 1987) 10 ... Bxf3 11 Bxf3 Qe8 12 Kf2 fxe4 with gradual equality, and the sharp 9 ... g5! 10 Nxg5 Nf6! (I am sure that Morphy would not have neglected such ideas!) 11 h3 Bxe2 12 Qxe2 Qg6 13 d5 Ne5 14 Nf3 Bh6! with excellent compensation for the pawn (Barle-Portisch, Portoroz/Ljubljana 1975).

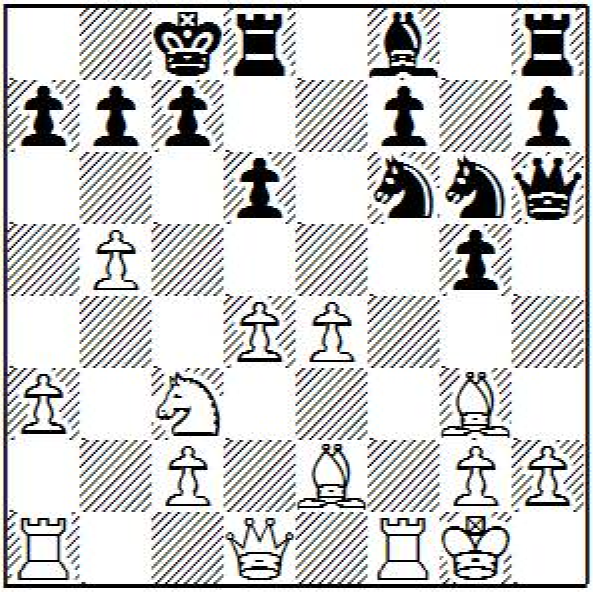
10 a3! (it turns out that the queen is also uncomfortable on the queenside) **10 ... Bxf3 11 Kxf3!**

The right way! Paulsen was hoping for 11 Bxf3 g5! 12 Bg3 Bg7 with counterplay.

11 ... Qh5+ (now 11 ... g5? is bad on account of 12 b4 Qb6 13 Be3 with the threats of d4-d5, Nd5 or Na4) **12 Ke3 Qh4 13 b4!**

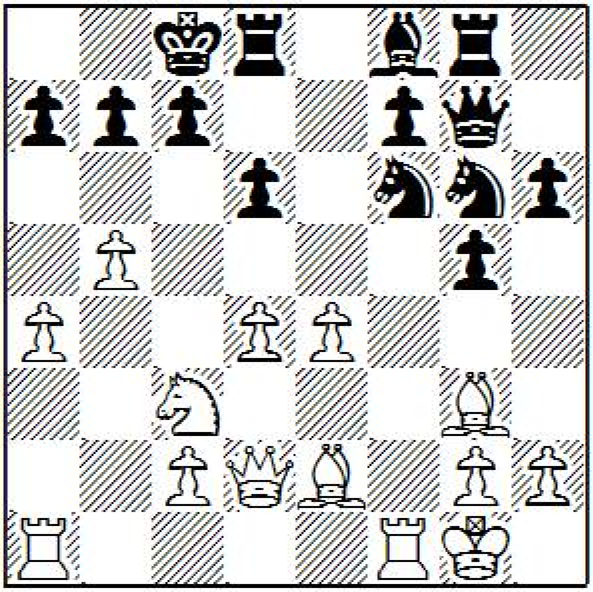
White not only pursues the queen, but also gradually prepares an attack on the king.

13 ... g5 14 Bg3 Qh6 15 b5 Nce7 16 Rf1 Nf6 17 Kf2 Ng6 18 Kg1!



‘It is hard to believe that out of 18 moves White has made six with his king! The unfortunate position of the black queen is very evident.’ (Neishtadt) The outcome of the game is already decided: Black’s scattered army is unable to come to the aid of its king.

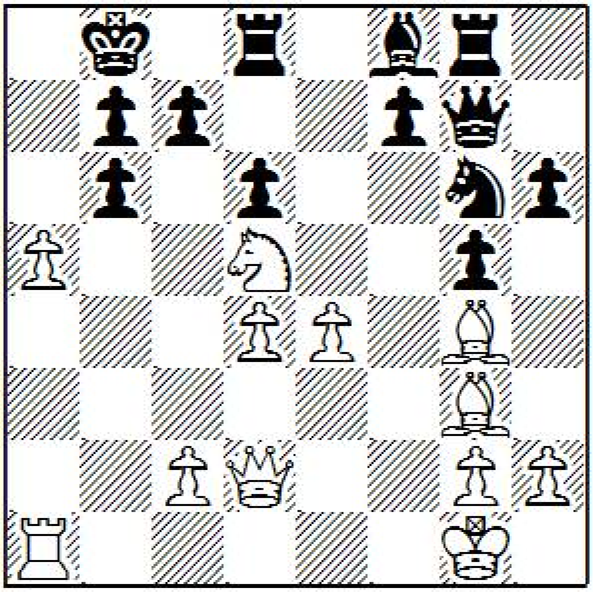
18 ... Qg7 19 Qd2 h6 20 a4 Rg8



21 b6! (a pawn sacrifice to open a file for a direct attack on the king – a procedure that was to become typical in the 20th century) **21 ... axb6 22 Rxf6!**

A spectacular exchange sacrifice, securing the d5-square for the knight.

23 ... Qxf6 23 Bg4+ Kb8 24 Nd5 Qg7 25 a5 (all the white forces take part in the attack!)

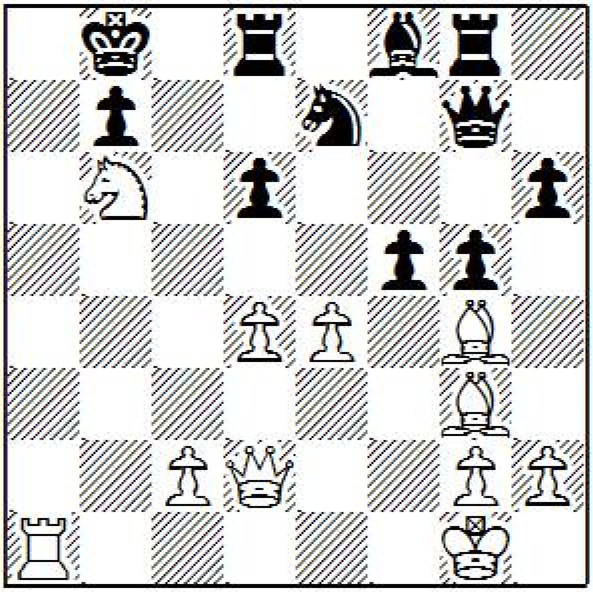


25 ... f5

A desperate attempt to delay the end, by including the queen in the defence. Other replies would have lost more quickly, for example: 25 ... Ne7 (25 ... c5 26 axb6!) 26 axb6 cxb6 (26 ... Nxd5 27 Ra8+! Kxa8 28 Qa5+ and mate) 27 Nxb6, or 25 ... b5 26 a6 b6 (26 ... bxa6 27 Qa5) 27 a7+ Kb7 28 Nxc7 Kxc7 29 Qc3+ Kb7 30 Bd7! etc.

26 axb6 cxb6 27 Nxb6! Ne7

Mate follows after 27 ... fxg4 28 Ra8+ Kc7 29 Qc3+ Kxb6 30 Qa5+ Kc6 31 d5+ Kd7 32 Qd8 mate.



28 exf5

‘Much stronger than 28 Qc3, when there is 28 ... Nc6 (29 Ra8+ Kc7 30 Nd5+ Kd7 31 Bxf5+ Ke8).’ (Neishtadt) However, here White has 31 exf5! Qxd4+ (31 ... Rxa8 32 f6+ and 33 fxg7) 32 Qxd4 Nxd4 33 Nf6+ Kc7 34 Rxd8 Kxd8 35 Nxg8 winning. But from the computer’s point of view, 28 Qb4 would have forced mate more quickly – 28 ... Kc7 29 Na8+ Kc8 30 Bxf5+ Rd7 31 Bxd7+ Kxd7 32 Qxd6+ Ke8 33 Nc7+ Kf7 34 Qe6 mate. But we hardly have the right to criticise Steinitz for such an ‘error’.

28 ... Qf7 29 f6 Nc6 30 c4 (unhurried, but sufficient) **30 ... Na7 31 Qa2 Nb5**

Desperation ...

32 Nd5

Again the computer prefers something different – 32 Qa8+ Kc7 33 Qa5 with mate in three moves. Of course, Black could have resigned, but he preferred to be mated.

32 ... Qxd5 33 cxd5 Nxd4 34 Qa7+ Kc7 35 Rc1+ Nc6 36 Rxc6 mate!

In the second half of the tournament Steinitz also defeated Paulsen with Black, in good positional style. A lengthy period of re-evaluating chess values was beginning. ‘At the tournaments in Paris (1867) and Baden-Baden (1870) I was hoping to take first prize,’ the first world champion later recalled. ‘On failing to achieve this, I was forced to think things over and I came to the conclusion that combinative play, although it sometimes gives fine results, is not able to ensure solid success. After a careful study of this type of game (*including, no doubt, those from his match with Anderssen – G. K.*) I discovered in them a number of defects. Many tempting and successful sacrifices turned out to be incorrect. I came to the conviction that sound defence demands far less expenditure of energy than attack. In general an attack has chances of success only when the opponent’s position is already weakened. Since then my thinking has been aimed at finding a simple and sure way of weakening the enemy position.’ A revolutionary step in the understanding of chess! Anderssen & Co. remain in the past ...

In 1872 Steinitz won the international tournament in London (2. Blackburne, 3. Zukertort), then also a match against the young Zukertort (+7 -1 =4), and in 1873 he won an important international tournament in Vienna (2. Blackburne, 3. Anderssen), thus significantly enhancing his reputation as the strongest player in the world.

Soon he obtained a regular tribune – a chess column in the English sports newspaper *The Field*, where for nearly nine years he commented on the most interesting master games. This was a time not only of comparative material prosperity, but also of tireless searching, the gradual development of new playing principles.

On the way Steinitz scored a completely crushing (+7) match win against Blackburne – in the 1870s the most vivid representative of the combinative school. ‘He felt himself obliged to demonstrate to his opponents *in practice* that their attacks were premature and therefore incorrect,’ writes Euwe. ‘This was an extremely difficult task, forcing Steinitz to develop the theory of defence; and since before him defensive skill was in its infancy, he was forced to be the pioneer.’

Believing religiously in the defensive properties of his cramped but unweakened positions, Steinitz considered it his duty to refute gambits and he would often deliberately provoke an attack against his king. The following characteristic game from the aforementioned match with Blackburne was highly rated and demonstrated many times in his lectures by Lasker.

Game 15

J.Blackburne-W.Steinitz

Match, London 1876, 4th game

Scotch Game C45

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Qh4!?

‘Agreeing to subject himself to an attack, but winning a pawn.’ (Lasker) And, I should add, avoiding the insipid struggle for equality after 4 ... Nf6 5 Nxc6 bxc6 6 Bd3 (nowadays 6 e5 is topical) 6 ... d5 7 Qe2 Be7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Bf4 Rb8 10 Nd2 Re8 11 e5 Bf8 12 Nb3 Nd7 13 Bg3 c5 14 c4 d4 15 f4 Rb6 16 Rae1 (Blackburne-Steinitz, London 1875).

5 Nb5 Bb4+ (5 ... Qxe4+ 6 Be3! Paulsen-Steinitz, Vienna 1882; Chigorin-Steinitz, Havana 19th matchgame 1892)

6 Bd2!

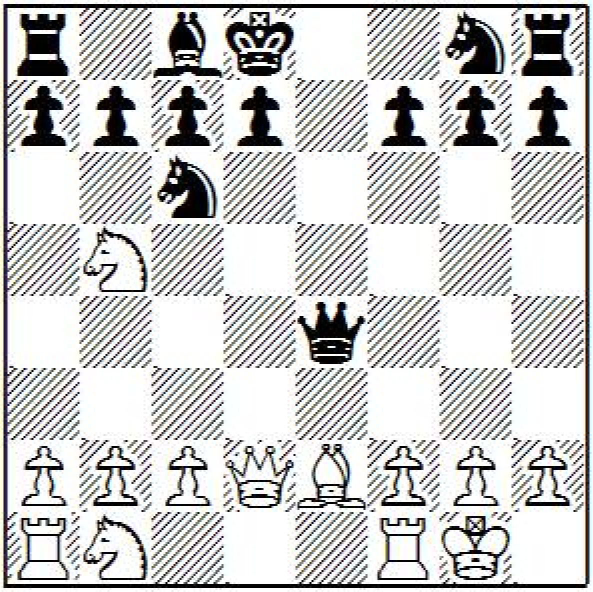
Inferior is 6 N1c3 Ba5!

6 ... Qxe4+ 7 Be2 Kd8!

‘The king defends the pawn, taking up a comparatively safe position.’ (Lasker) Other replies clearly favour White: 7 ... Bxd2+ 8 Qxd2 (8 Nxd2!) 8 ... Qe5 9 f4 Qxb2 10 0-0 Qxa1 11 N1c3 (Bronstein), or 7 ... Qxg2 8 Bf3 Bxd2+ 9 Nxd2 Qh3 10 Bxc6! bxc6 11 Nxc7+ Kd8 12 Nxa8 Nf6 13 Qf3.

8 0-0 Bxd2 9 Qxd2

9 Nxd2 comes into consideration, for example: 9 ... Qf4 10 g3 Qh6 11 Nc4 Nge7 12 Qd3 a6 13 Nd4 Nxd4 14 Qxd4 Nc6 15 Qc3 with sufficient compensation, or 9 ... Qe5 10 Re1 Nf6 (10 ... Nge7!?) 11 Bc4 (11 Nf3!?) 11 ... Qf5 (11 ... Qc5 12 c3!) 12 Nf3 with the initiative (Sveshnikov-Sermek, Bled 1994).



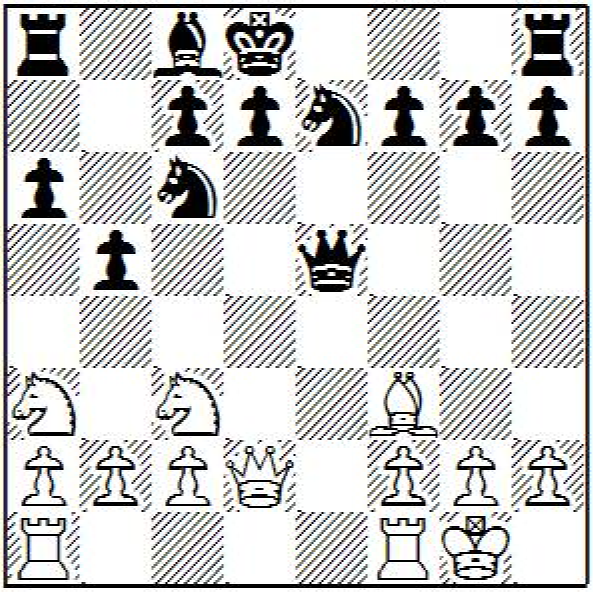
9 ... a6!?

'The advanced white knight may cause problems, and so it is driven back.' (Lasker) In the second game of the match Steinitz played 9 ... Nf6 and after 10 N1c3 Qe5 11 Rfe1 a6 12 Na3 Qd4 13 Qg5 Rg8 14 Rad1 h6 15 Qg3 Qe5 16 Qh4 Qg5 17 Qc4 White retained compensation for the pawn (although in the end he lost).

10 N1c3

The attempt 10 N5a3 Qd4 11 Qg5+ Qf6 12 Qd2 ended in failure in the sixth game: 12 ... Qxb2 13 Nc4 Qd4! 14 Qc1 Nge7 15 Nbd2 d6 16 Rd1 Be6 etc.

10 ... Qe5 11 Na3 b5!? 12 Bf3 Nge7



13 Rad1

Black’s position is extremely dangerous, as is evident from the variation 13 Rfe1!? Qf6? 14 Rxe7! And if 13 ... Qd6 White could have maintained the pressure by 14 Nd5 Re8 15 Rad1 or gone into a slightly superior ending: 14 Qxd6 cxd6 15 Ne4 Kc7 16 c4.

13 ... Qf5 14 Rfe1 Rb8!

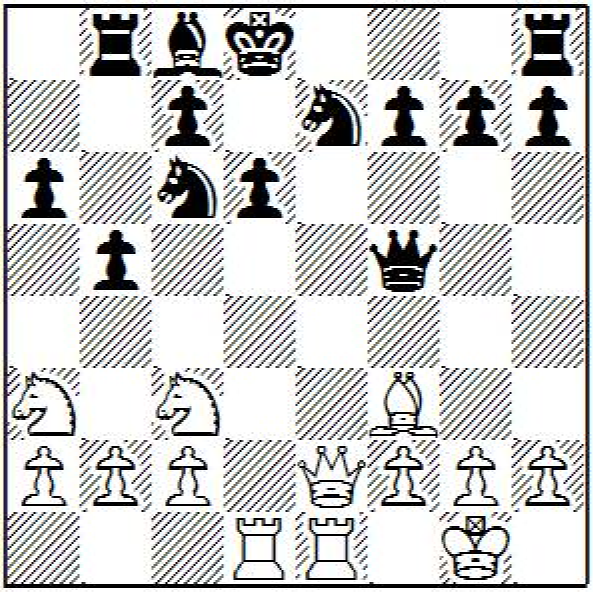
As Lasker put it, ‘the rook seeks a safe square.’

15 Qe2?

But this really is a hideous move! The commentators did not in fact answer the question: where did Blackburne make the decisive mistake? I will answer: after the move in the game White loses his compensation for the pawn, whereas after 15 Bxc6! (an unexpected exchange, but here the bishop is not needed) 15 ... Nxc6 16 Nd5 Bb7 17 c4 he would still have had a rather unpleasant initiative: it is hard for Black to complete his development.

15 ... d6

‘It is interesting in the highest degree to follow how little by little the defending side arranges his pieces for offensive action.’ (Lasker).

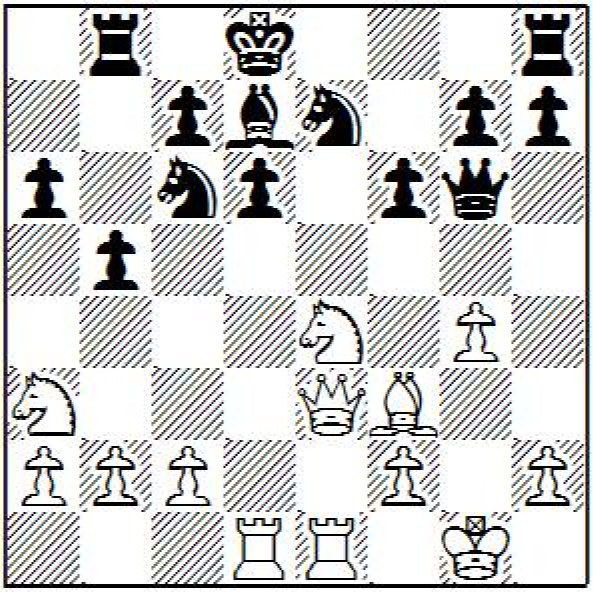


16 Ne4 Bd7 17 Qe3 f6 (17 ... Re8!? looks even better) **18 g4?**

After this lunge, combined with the following knight sacrifice, there is no longer any way back.

18 ... Qg6

Threatening to launch a counterattack.



19 Nxd6?!

A desperate piece sacrifice, which merely hastens the end.

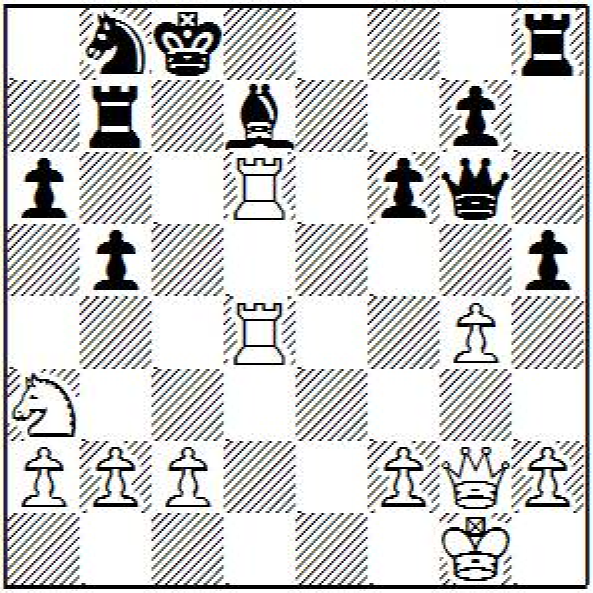
19 ... cxd6 20 Rxd6 Kc7 (20 ... Ne5!?) **21 Bxc6**

If 21 Qc5 Steinitz would have had to find the firm reply 21 ... Qg5!, and after 22 Rxe7 Qxc5 23 Rexd7+ Kb6 24 Rxc6+ (or 24 b4 Qxb4 25 Rxc6+ Ka5 26 Rdd6 Ra8 and wins) 24 ... Qxc6 25 Bxc6 Kxc6 26 Rxg7 Rbg8 it would all have been over.

21 ... Nxc6 22 Qg3 Kc8 23 Red1 Rb7 24 Qg2 Nb8

'Strengthening the weakest point – the bishop at d7.' (Lasker)

25 R1d4 h5!



The long-awaited counterattack. There is nothing more to comment on: White is material down and in a completely hopeless position.

26 Qd5 Qg5 27 Qxg5 fxg5 28 Rg6 Bxg4 29 Rxg5 Re8 30 Kg2 Rf7 31 h3 Bd7 32 Kg3 Re2 33 Rxh5 Rexf2 34 Rc5+ Nc6,

and Black won on move 51.

After this match Steinitz did not take part in any serious competitions for six years(!), earning his living by giving extraordinarily successful simultaneous displays (including some blindfold – it was about him that they said: he came, he did not see, he conquered) and his tireless commentary work in *The Field*. Thanks to his deep and witty analyses, his positional theory, which was still not understood by anyone, step-by-step acquired increasingly real form ...

Studying the games of that time, one sees how they gradually become more complicated, how their quality improves, and how the resistive capacity of the players and their defensive skill increases. On the other hand, the best masters also had to develop their attacking skill, seeking new continuations in well-known set-ups. Here too Steinitz was successful! Moreover, he was not satisfied by seeking isolated improvements, but he developed complete strategic trends in the opening and the middlegame, based on his theory of accumulating small advantages. A classic example of such an innovation is his ‘Steinitz Variation’ in the French Defence.

Game 16

W.Steinitz-A.Sellmann

Baltimore 1885

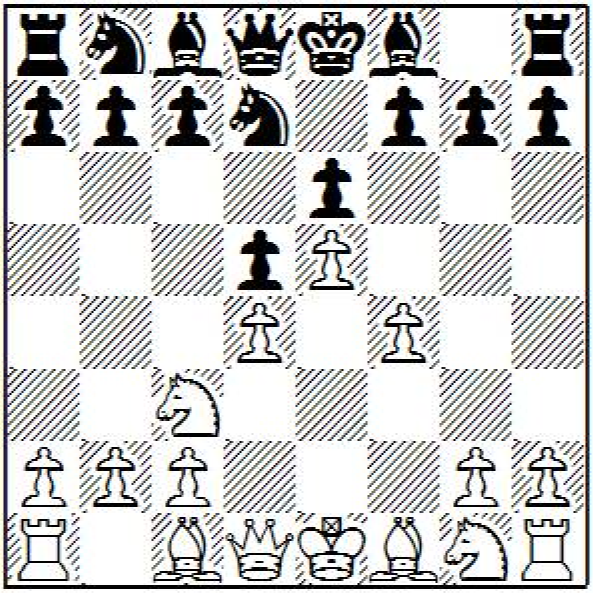
French Defence C11

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5

Previously Steinitz also played like Anderssen – 4 Bg5.

4 ... Nfd7 5 f4!?

Before this, also following the example of Anderssen, it was thought that the only way to fight for an advantage was to maintain the pawn centre by 5 Nce2 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 f4 Qb6 8 Nf3 (Steinitz-Fleissig, Vienna 1873). Today, in a new cycle in the evolution of chess, this variation is employed with great success by Anand.



5 ... c5 6 dxc5!?

‘Steinitz’s patent. The systematic play, begun with this move, aimed at creating and exploiting the piece outpost on d4, made a great impression, especially on the next generation of masters.’ (Neishtadt) Nowadays this classical plan is usually carried out after 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Be3!

6 ... Bxc5 (6 ... Nc6 7 Nf3 Bxc5 is safer) **7 Nf3**

The alternative is 7 Qg4!? 0-0 8 Nf3.

7 ... a6

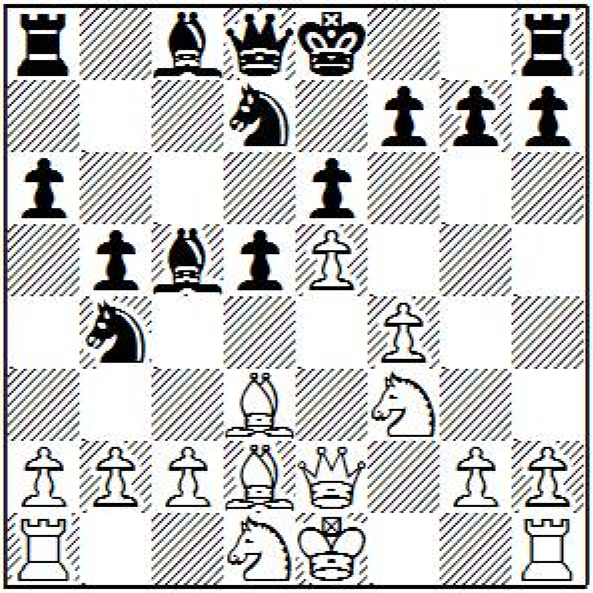
Not an essential move. If 7 ... 0-0?! 8 Bd3 Nc6 White has the attractive 9 h4! f6 10 Ng5! fxg5 11 Bxh7+! Kxh7 12 hxg5+ Kg8 13 Qh5 Ndxe5 14 fxe5 Rf5 15 g4 Rxe5+ 16 Kd1 Be3 17 Bxe3 Rxe3 18 Nb5 Rf3 19 g6 Kf8 20 Qh8+ Ke7 21 Qxg7+ 1-0 (Steinitz-Golmayo, Havana 1888). But 7 ... Nc6 8 Bd3 f6! is better, immediately undermining the strong e5-pawn: after 9 exf6 Nxf6 10 Qe2 0-0 11 Bd2 Nd4 or 11 ... Bd7 Black has no problems.

8 Bd3 Nc6 9 Qe2 Nb4?!

A fundamental mistake: Black loses control over the centre! More appropriate is 9 ... Qc7 10 Bd2 b5 11 a3 Rb8 12 Nd1 Nb6 with equal chances (Boleslavsky-Pachman, Saltsjöbaden interzonal 1948). But it was as if Sellmann had set himself the aim of accompanying his opponent in the creation of a positional masterpiece, and of helping the latter to demonstrate his plan in its purest form.

10 Bd2 b5 11 Nd1

I would have preferred 11 a3!? Nxd3 12 cxd3, not moving the knight away from the key d4-square.



11 ... Nxd3+ 12 cxd3!

It may seem strange to attach an exclamation mark to a move which today would be automatically made by any candidate master. But then, in 1885, the consequences of the pawn capture were by no means obvious, and the majority of players were simply unable to think long-term.

12 ... Qb6?!

Here 12 ... b4! suggests itself (seizing space on the queenside and not allowing White to fix the a5- and c5-squares) 13 Rc1 a5 with the intention of ... Ba6, although after 14 Be3 White retains some advantage.

13 b4!

'Beginning play on the queenside, where the opponent has a weak square at c5, whereas Steinitz's c4-square is defended by the d3-pawn.' (Lasker)

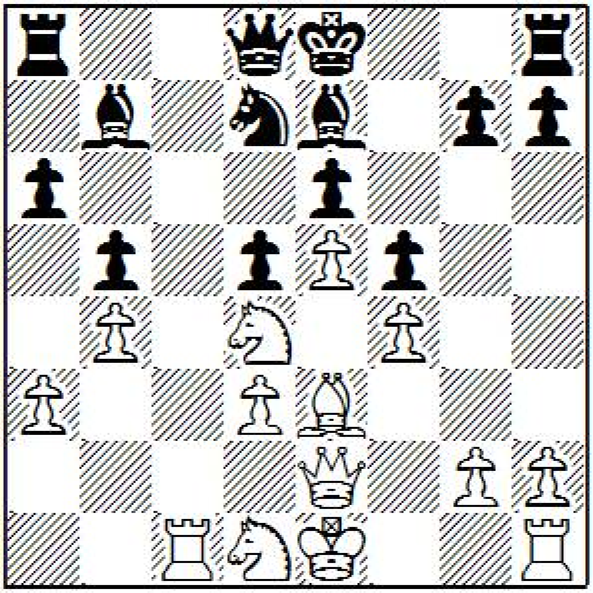
13 ... Be7 14 a3 f5?

Essentially the decisive positional mistake: Black leaves himself without counterplay. 14 ... f6 has been recommended, but in my view the radical 14 ... d4! 15 Qf2 Bb7 was essential, opening up the bishop and retaining the possibility of the undermining move ... f7-f6.

15 Rc1 (15 Be3!?) **15 ... Bb7?**

The last chance was 15 ... d4! 16 Qf2 Bb7, sacrificing the d-pawn for the sake of activating the bishop.

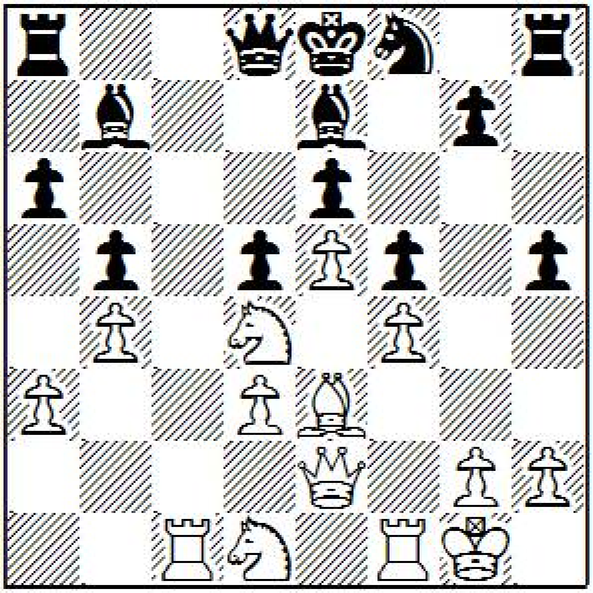
16 Be3 Qd8 17 Nd4



Here it is, the dream of a player from the 20th century: a powerful knight at d4 against a pitiful bishop at b7. Now Black can merely await the inevitable execution.

17 ... Nf8 18 0-0 h5?!

Preventing the g2-g4 breakthrough, which could have been unpleasant with the king on f7. However, although the game is decided on the opposite wing, later White is able to benefit from the weakening of the g5-square and the h4-d8 diagonal. Never advance your pawns without real need – this is one of Steinitz's basic rules!



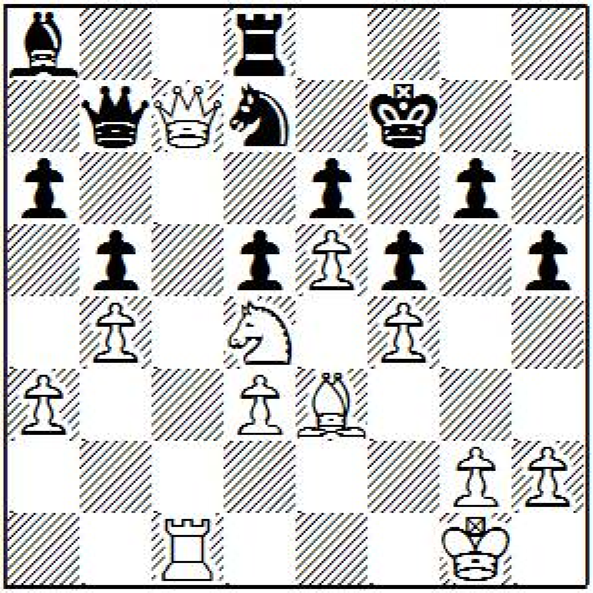
19 Nc3!

‘The start of a multi-move manoeuvre, the aim of which is to create an outpost at a weak point in the enemy position.’ (Lasker) The knight is aiming for a5.

19 ... Kf7 20 Nb1! g6 21 Nd2 Nd7 22 N2b3 Rc8 23 Na5

At last! White tightens the noose around the opponent’s neck.

23 ... Ba8 24 Rxc8 Qxc8 25 Rc1 Qb8 26 Qc2 Bd8 27 Nac6 Qb7 28 Nxd8+ (exchanging the defender of the dark squares) **28 ... Rxd8 29 Qc7!** (the decisive invasion)



29 ... Qb8

Sellmann has defended his main weaknesses, but here Steinitz brings another piece into play.

30 Bf2!

With the threat of Bh4 – here you have the consequences of 18 ... h5?! Now the defensive resources are exhausted.

30 ... Qb6 31 Nf3 Qxc7 32 Rxc7 Ke8 33 Ng5 Nf8 34 Bc5 Nd7 35 Bd6 1-0

Black is in zugzwang and is unable to defend his e6- and a6-pawns. A strategic triumph!

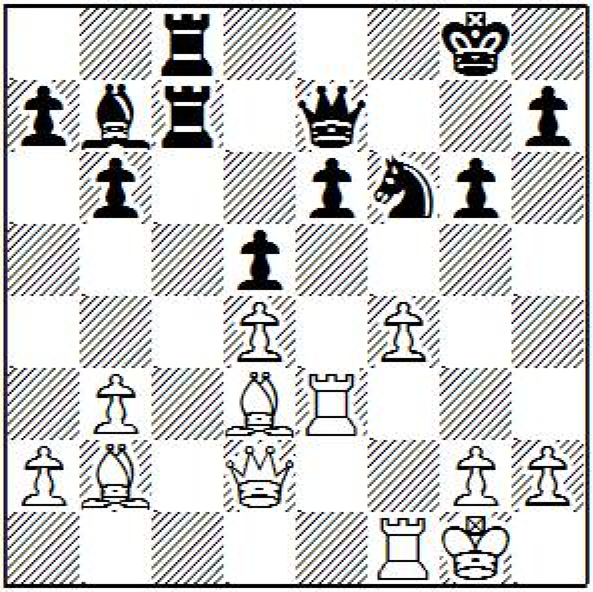
An Historic Match

Steinitz resumed playing in 1882, sharing first place at the international tournament in Vienna. Zukertort, who by now had become remarkably strong, was overshadowed here (although he defeated Steinitz in their mini-match: 1½-½), but soon he achieved the greatest success in his career, winning the famous London tournament of 1883: 1. Zukertort – 22 out of 26; 2. Steinitz – 19; 3. Blackburne – 16½; 4. Chigorin – 16. For the first time in many years the question arose: who in fact was now the world's strongest player?

Johann Hermann Zukertort (1842-1888) was Anderssen's most talented pupil and he played at least a thousand games with him, including two matches: in 1863 (+3 -8 =1) and in 1871 (+5 -2). Then together with his teacher he edited the magazine *Neue Berliner Schachzeitung*, and with Dufresne he also wrote a popular manual. In 1872 Zukertort settled in London and, although he had a medical education, he gave up his medical practice and devoted himself entirely to chess. In 1879 he founded (together with Lipót Hoffer) the magazine *Chess Monthly*, on the pages of which he engaged in sharp arguments with Steinitz. He was fluent in a dozen languages, had a phenomenal memory, and gave record-breaking simultaneous blindfold displays. It need hardly be said that the natural element of the outstanding German master was combination ...

Game 17

J.Zukertort-J.Blackburne
London 1883

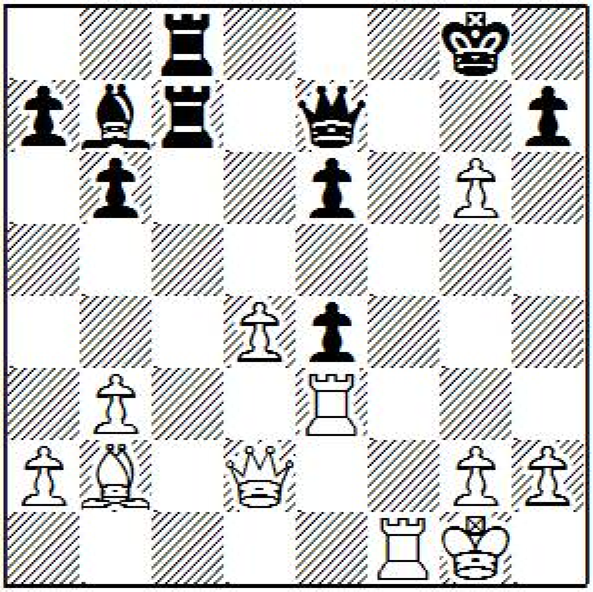


23 f5! (in the words of Steinitz, ‘the start of a remarkable conception of grandiose scale’) **23 ... Ne4**

Black was pinning all his hopes on this move. 23 ... gxf5 24 Bxf5 Ne4 25 Bxe4 dxe4 was unsatisfactory in view of 26 Rg3+ Kh8 27 d5+ e5 28 d6.

24 Bxe4 dxe4 25 fxg6!

‘This unexpected move, allowing Black to invade with his rook on c2 and “win” a piece, was undoubtedly foreseen by Zukertort much earlier. The essence of the remarkable combinative idea concealed in it is still far from obvious.’ (Romanovsky)

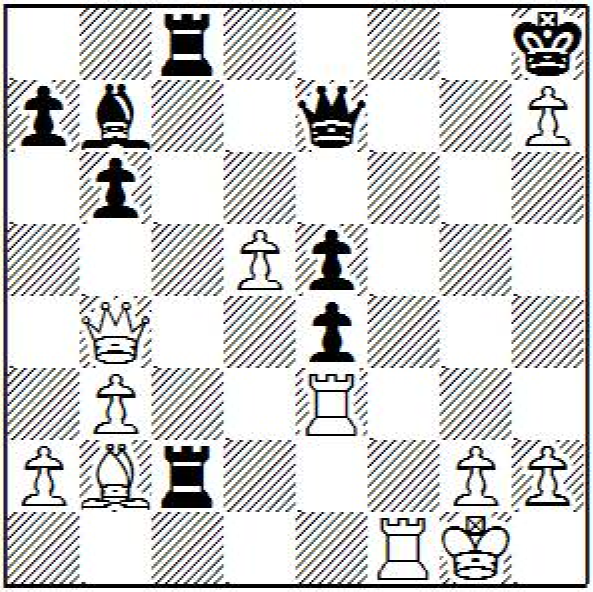


25 ... Rc2

‘Despite its ruinous consequences, this is perhaps the only chance. 25 ... hxg6 26 Rg3 Qg7 27 d5 e5 28 Qg5 Re8 29 Rf6 is hopeless for Black.’ (Zukertort)

26 gxh7+ Kh8 27 d5+ e5 28 Qb4!!

The point of White’s idea is the diversion of the enemy queen!



28 ... R8c5

If 28 ... Qxb4 there would have followed 29 Bxe5+ Kxh7 30 Rh3+ Kg6 31 Rg3+ Kh6 (or 31 ... Kh7 32 Rf7+) 32 Rf6+ Kh5 33 Rf5+ Kh6 34 Bf4+ Kh7 35 Rh5 mate, while if 28 ... Qe8 29 Rf8+! Qxf8 30 Bxe5+ Kxh7 31 Qxe4+!

29 Rf8+!

'In conjunction with White's previous play, this forms one of the most noble combinations conceived over the chessboard.' (Steinitz)

29 ... Kxh7 (or 29 ... Qxf8 30 Bxe5+ Kxh7 31 Qxe4+ with a rapid mate) **30 Qxe4+ Kg7 31 Bxe5+ Kxf8 32 Bg7+! Kg8** (32 ... Qxg7 33 Qe8 mate) **33 Qxe7 1-0**

'Words are insufficient to express the admiration of the mastery with which Zukertort conducted this game,' wrote Steinitz in the press, and at the same time, as if anticipating the future, in a letter to his future biographer L. Bachmann he commented: 'True strength also assumes strength of character, and for this reason I have doubts about Zukertort's genius ... '

Naturally, Steinitz was eager to regain the reputation of the number one player in the world: immediately after the London tournament he challenged Zukertort to a match. The battle between the two stars promised to become an event comparable with the legendary Morphy-Anderssen encounter. However, as the jokers of the time expressed it, 'the greatest of matches of our time demanded, if not the greatest, then the longest negotiations.'

Meanwhile, before London 1883 the publisher of *The Field* had closed down Steinitz's chess column (and after the tournament it was relaunched ... under the editorship of Hoffer and Zukertort!), and the maestro had to seek other work. Alas, in England he was unable to find any ... In the autumn of 1883 Steinitz emigrated to America, declaring that he was ready to play Zukertort anywhere, except in London. From then on his numerous commentaries and articles were published in the New York *Tribune* and in his own *International Chess Magazine*, which was begun with the help of new friends in 1885.

There in the USA, now after the death of the great Morphy, the organisers of a Steinitz-Zukertort match were announced. Everyone accepted Steinitz's suggestion to play to 10 wins, draws not counting, and to consider this competition – for the first time in history! – an official match for the title Champion of the World.

There was an important nuance: with a score of 9-9 the match would be considered to have ended in a draw, since the players did not want the outcome of such an important duel to rest on the result of one game. Such a rule was to apply later in a number of unlimited matches for the world championship, and it became a stumbling-block in the years when Fischer was champion (as will be described in a later volume).

The long-awaited match began on 11 January 1886 in New York, before a large crowd of spectators, in Cartier's Rooms on Fifth Avenue. The moves were displayed on a special demonstration board, and the demonstrator was the well-known master McKenzie! They played for a stake of $2000 from each side, three games a week, up to four wins for one of the players in New York, up to a further three in St Louis, and then in New Orleans, Morphy's home town. The time control was two hours for 30 moves, then, after a two-hour break for dinner, one hour for 15 moves (it will be remembered that, beginning in London 1883, modern double-sided clocks were used).

As was remarked on in the press, in appearance Steinitz was the complete opposite of Zukertort. The latter was a thin man, with a fine, spiritual face, set off by a short beard. Whereas Steinitz looked more like a representative of the business world than of an intellectual pursuit: a massive, thickset figure, with a resolute bearing, large round face, flat nose, deep-set eyes, uncombed, tousled beard, and enormous, mane-like reddish-brown sideburns. Perhaps their only common feature was their 'lively, burning eyes ... '

The match began catastrophically for Steinitz: after winning the first game in excellent style, he then suffered four successive defeats (moreover, in the third game he completely outplayed his opponent strategically, and in the fourth he blundered a piece in a slightly better position). However, the future champion did not despair: such a start was not something he needed to become accustomed to ... The match moved on to St Louis, where Steinitz immediately gained two wins, and the scores became closer: 3-4. In the eighth game the first draw was finally recorded. The tension had reached breaking point: now much depended on who won the next game ...

Here it should be remembered that in this match Steinitz was fighting not only for the title of world champion, but also for the triumph of his principles. He had long since become aware that chess was subject to definite laws and that one should always play strictly according to a plan, taking into account the features of the specific position. And one should attack only if a sufficient number of small advantages has been accumulated, stemming from certain properties of the position (temporary or long-term), such as: lead in development, mobility of the pieces, seizure of the centre, position of the enemy king, weak squares in the opponent’s position, superior pawn formation, pawn majority on the queenside, open lines, and the advantage of the two bishops.

Steinitz particularly valued such a stable feature as the pawn formation, studying three types of pawns (pinned, isolated and doubled), and also the weakness and strength not only of the pawns themselves, but also the neighbouring squares. In particular, he established that an isolated pawn in the centre is a weakness, a target for a systematic attack, and the square in front of it a convenient springboard for a minor piece, especially a knight. And it was in the match with Zukertort that a clear conception of how to play against the ‘isolani’ was first revealed!

One of the classic examples is the ninth game, in which Steinitz once again showed himself to be an outstanding master of defence.

Game 18

J.Zukertort-W.Steinitz

World Championship, St Louis 1886, ninth game

Queen’s Gambit Accepted D26

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3

In the seventh game after 4 e3 c5 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 a3 dxc4 7 Bxc4 cxd4 8 exd4 Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Be3?! Steinitz demonstrated for the first time an exemplary arrangement of the forces for Black: 10 ... Bd7 11 Qd3 (11 d5 equalises) 11 ... Rc8 12 Rac1?! Qa5 13 Ba2 Rfd8 14 Rfe1?! Be8! 15 Bb1 g6 16 Qe2 Bf8 17 Red1 Bg7 18 Ba2 Ne7 with an excellent game.

4 ... dxc4 5 e3

More active is 5 e4!, and after 5 ... Bb4 6 Bg5 c5 7 Bxc4 the popular Vienna Variation is reached. Also possible is the trendy 5 Qa4+ c6 (5 ... Nbd7 6 e4) 6 Qxc4, as occasionally played by Karpov, and then also Kramnik.

5 ... c5

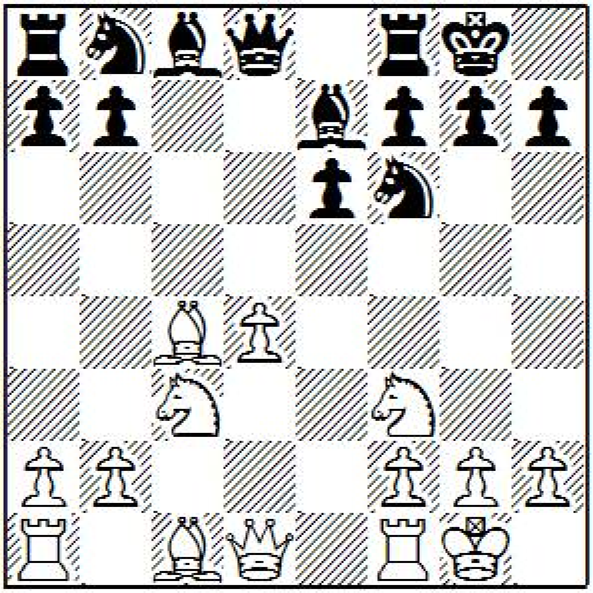
From the viewpoint of modern theory Black easily equalises by 5 ... a6! 6 a4 (6 Bxc4 b5 7 Bb3 Bb7 is equal) 6 ... c5 7 Bxc4 Nc6 8 0-0 Be7, and in view of his premature Nc3 White is unable to defend his d4-pawn by Qe2 and Rd1, for example: 9 Qe2 (9 dxc5 Qxd1 10 Rxd1 Bxc5 is dead level) 9 ... cxd4 10 Rd1 e5 11 exd4 exd4 12 Nxd4 Nxd4 13 Qe5 Qd6 with equality.

6 Bxc4 cxd4

6 ... Nc6 is slightly more accurate, for the moment not opening the diagonal for the bishop at c1.

7 exd4 (7 Nxd4 a6 is equal) **7 ... Be7 8 0-0 0-0**

The first world champion also played 8 ... Nc6!, preventing Qe2 by the attack on the d4-pawn. For example: 9 Bf4 0-0 10 Re1 Bd7 (10 ... Qb6!?) 11 Qe2 Qa5 (11 ... Rac8!?) 12 Nb5 a6 13 Bc7 b6 14 Nc3 Rfc8 15 Bf4 b5 16 Bb3 Qb6 17 Red1 (17 d5!?) 17 ... Na5! 18 Bc2 Nc4 with equal chances (Zukertort-Steinitz, USA 13th matchgame 1886), or 10 Rc1 Qb6 11 Qd2 Rd8 12 Rfd1 Bd7 13 Qe2 Be8 14 Bd3 Rac8 with equality (Pillsbury-Steinitz, St Petersburg 1895/96).



9 Qe2 (9 Ne5!?) **9 ... Nbd7?!**

Nevertheless better was 9 ... Nc6 10 Rd1 Na5! 11 Bd3 b6 and ... Bb7.

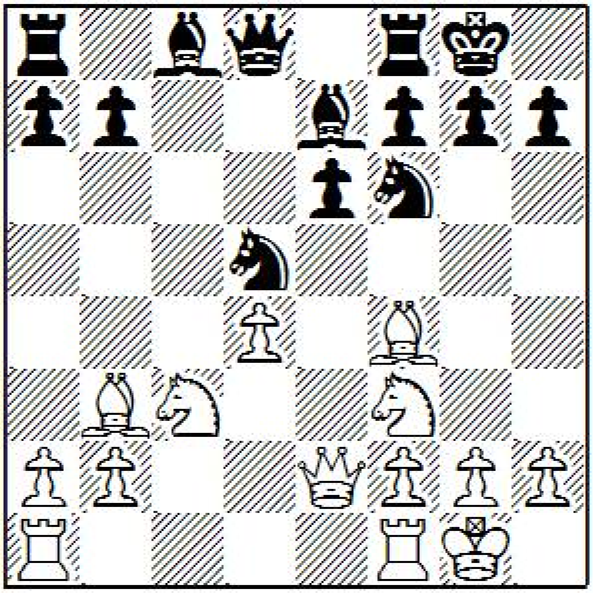
10 Bb3

Zukertort does not even think about 10 d5 exd5 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 Bxd5 Nf6 13 Bb3 Bf5 14 Rd1 Qe8 15 Nd4 Bd7 with equal chances, since, in the words of Euwe, ‘he by no means regards the d4-pawn as a minus of his position.’

10 ... Nb6 11 Bf4

It is more competent to place the bishop on g5 (the battle for the d5-square!), and the simple 11 Rd1 Nbd5 12 Bg5 Qa5 13 Rac1 retains an enduring initiative. However, this only became clear much later, by the efforts of Botvinnik, who broke up Black’s defences by Ne5 and f2-f4-f5.

11 ... Nbd5



12 Bg3

‘It is hard to see any purpose, a logical sequence in Zukertort’s moves. He simply puts his pieces on squares where they enjoy mobility and hopes for complications in which to exercise his talent for combination.’ (Lasker) But even for Lasker and Euwe the positional battle around the ‘isolani’ largely remained ‘terra incognita’.

12 ... Qa5 (a subtle nuance: with the bishop at g3 White is unable to harass the queen by Bd2; the alternative was 12 ... b6!? and ... Bb7) **13 Rac1 Bd7 14 Ne5 Rfd8 15 Qf3**

15 Nxd7 Rxd7 and ... Rad8 was unfavourable for White, but 15 f4 was interesting.

15 ... Be8

A classical plan! ‘The best square for the bishop in such positions: here it does not interfere with the manoeuvres of the other black pieces, and in addition it carries out the important function of defending f7.’ (Euwe) It is obvious that White has lost his opening initiative and that he needs to concern himself with maintaining equality.

16 Bh4!

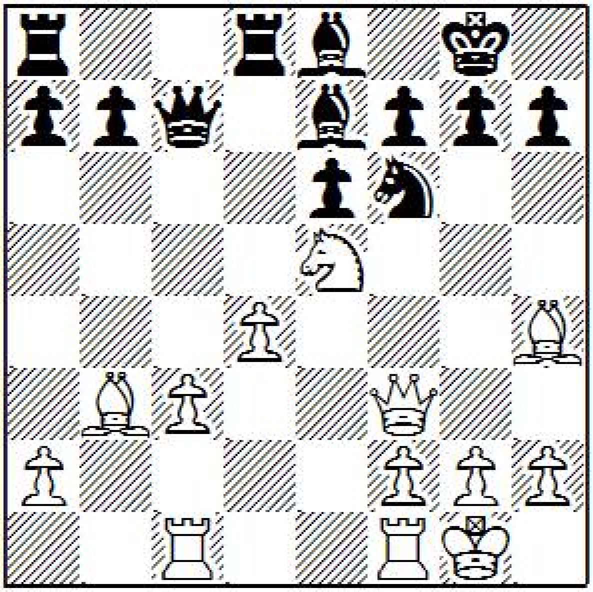
White finally hits on the idea of fighting for the d5-square. But during the time he has wasted, Black has solved the problem of his c8-bishop’s development – virtually the main one in such set-ups. (According to other sources, the order of moves was 16 Rfe1 Rac8 17 Bh4 Nxc3 18 bxc3 Qc7.)

16 ... Nxc3

Such moves are not made without necessity: why relieve the opponent of his ‘isolani’? But if 16 ... Rac8?!, then 17 Nxd5 is unpleasant, for example: 17 ... Nxd5 18 Bxe7 Nxe7 19 Qxb7, or 17 ... exd5 18 Ng4 Rxc1 19 Rxc1 Rc8 20 Rd1!

17 bxc3 Qc7

‘Defending the bishop at e7. The direct play for a blockade by 17 ... b5 was premature in view of 18 Ng4.’ (Neishtadt) The computer does not agree with this assessment: 18 ... Nxg4 19 Qxg4 (19 Bxe7? Nxh2! 20 Kxh2 Qc7+ 21 Kg1 Qxe7) 19 ... Bxh4 20 Qxh4 Bc6 21 f4 Qa3 with equal chances.



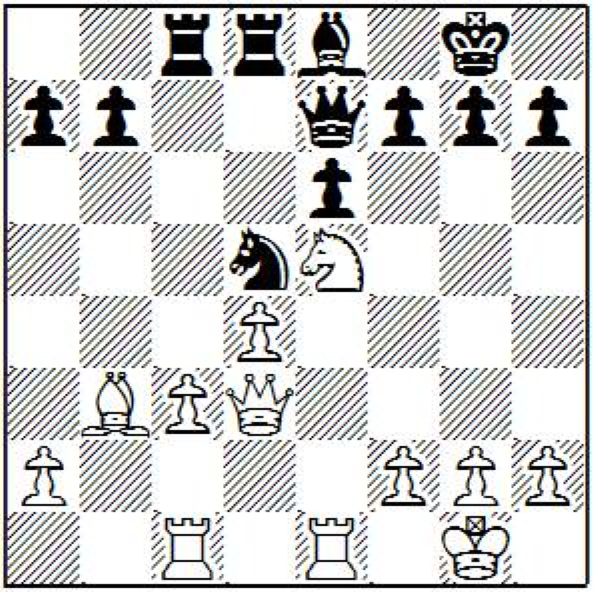
18 Rfe1 Rac8 19 Qd3?!

An aimless move. Zukertort does not realise that weak hanging pawns must be advanced, and then they can become strong! 19 Bg3 was correct, and if 19 ... Bd6, then 20 c4 – Lasker considered this position unclear, but in my opinion it favours White: 20 ... Nd7 21 Nxd7 Rxd7 22 d5! Bxg3 23 hxg3 exd5 24 Qe3 Qd8 25 cxd5 with a powerful passed pawn in the centre (the strength of which was then not yet appreciated!). Therefore 19 ... Qb6! was better, with double-edged play.

19 ... Nd5!

Immediately inducing exchanges: the fewer the pieces, the more obvious the weakness of the hanging pawns.

20 Bxe7 (20 Bg3 Qa5!?; possible was 20 Bc2 g6 21 Bxe7 Qxe7 22 Bb3 b5! 23 Bxd5 Rxd5 24 Qe3 with counterplay thanks to the weakness of the dark squares and the rather passive bishop at e8) **20 ... Qxe7**



21 Bxd5?

A fundamental positional mistake: before ... g7-g6 has been played, White should not take on d5! ‘White should have retained this excellent bishop, but in pursuit of forcing moves and combinations associated with them he even gives up his strong pieces.’ (Lasker) 21 Bc2 Nf6 (21 ... Qh4!?) 22 Ng4 g6 23 Ne5 was unclear, but the most logical (connected pawns must be advanced!) was 21 c4! Nf6 (21 ... Qg5?! 22 h4!) 22 Rcd1 with chances for both sides.

21 ... Rxd5 22 c4 Rdd8 23 Re3?

Play at the level of that time: an attempt to attack the king with inadequate means. What kind of attack is possible here? ‘White should have played 23 Red1 and then possibly Qb3, c4-c5 and Nc4-d6.’ (Euwe) But after 23 ... b6 Black has a comfortable game. Therefore I would prefer to sharpen the play by 23 d5!? b5 (this is what Steinitz had in mind) 24 Qh3!

23 ... Qd6 24 Rd1

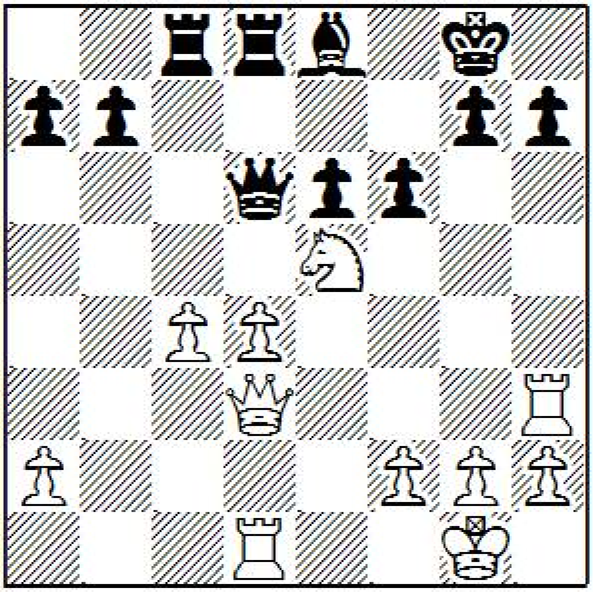
The trappy 24 Rh3!? can be met by 24 ... h6! (but not 24 ... Qxd4? 25 Qxh7+ Kf8 26 Re3!) 25 Rd1 f6 26 Ng4 Qf4, transposing into a position from the game.

24 ... f6

The consequence of the b3-bishop being exchanged: now the bishop at e8 can come out to g6 or h5.

25 Rh3!?

‘In search of a combination.’ (Lasker) In fact, White is in trouble: in the event of 25 Nf3 Qa6! (25 ... Bh5 26 Qb3 b6 27 h3 is not so clear) 26 Nd2 e5 27 d5 Qxa2 he has no compensation for the material deficit.



25 ... h6!

Parrying all the threats and beginning to seize the initiative. There was no point in Steinitz going in for the dangerous complications after 25 ... fxe5?! 26 Qxh7+ Kf8. For example:

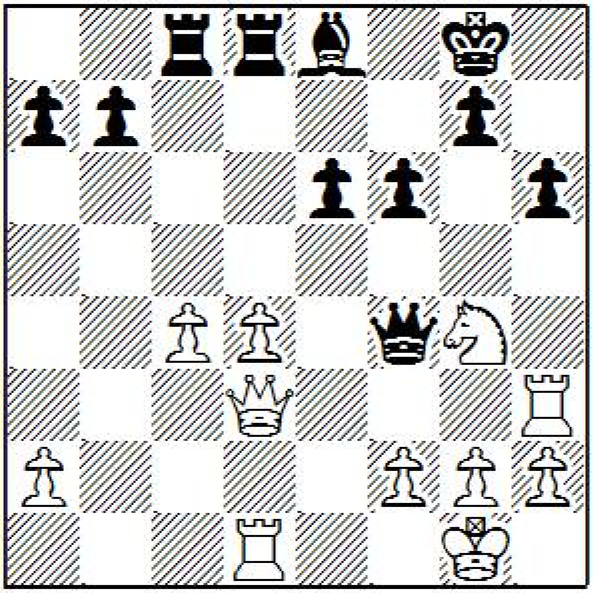
1) 27 Rf3+ Bf7 28 Qh5 (Neishtadt recommended 28 Qh8+ Ke7 29 Qxg7 Rf8 30 Rb1 b6 31 dxe5 'with an attack', but after 31 ... Qd4 there is insufficient compensation for the piece) 28 ... Rc7 (28 ... Qd7 29 Qh8+ Ke7 30 Qh4+ with perpetual check; 28 ... Rd7? 29 Qh8+) 29 c5 Qd5 30 Qh8+ Ke7 31 Qh4+ (but not 31 Qxg7? Rf8 32 h4 Qxf3! and wins) with a draw;

2) 27 Rg3!? Bad here are both 27 ... Rc7? 28 Qh8+ Ke7 29 c5! (29 Rxg7+ Bf7 30 Qh5 leads to a draw) 29 ... Qd5 30 Rxg7+ Bf7 31 Rxf7+ Kxf7 32 Qh7+ Kf6 33 Qxc7 exd4 34 Rd3, and 27 ... Bf7? 28 Rxg7 Rc7 29 c5 Qd7 (29 ... Qxc5? 30 Qh8+ Ke7 31 Rxf7+ Kxf7 32 Qh5+ Ke7 33 dxc5) 30 Qh8+ (30 Rd3!? Ravinsky) 30 ... Ke7 31 Qh4+ Ke8 32 Rh7!, and there only remains the 'machine' move 27 ... Rd7! 28 Qh8+ Ke7 29 Qh4+ (29 Rxg7+? Kd8 30 Rxd7+ Kxd7 31 Qg7+ Kd8 32 Qg5+ Kc7 favours Black) 29 ... Kf7 30 Qh7 with a draw.

26 Ng4

Unfavourable is 26 Ng6 Bxg6 27 Qxg6 Rxc4, and if 28 Rxh6 Qxd4! 29 Qh7+ Kf8 30 Qh8+ Kf7 31 Qxd8 Qxd8 and wins. Zukertort is hoping to sacrifice his knight on f6 or h6, but Black's next reply kills this idea.

26 ... Qf4!



27 Ne3

If 27 Rg3 Steinitz was planning 27 ... b5!, when 28 cxb5? is bad in view of 28 ... Rxd4! 29 Nxh6+ Kf8 30 Qa3+ Qd6.

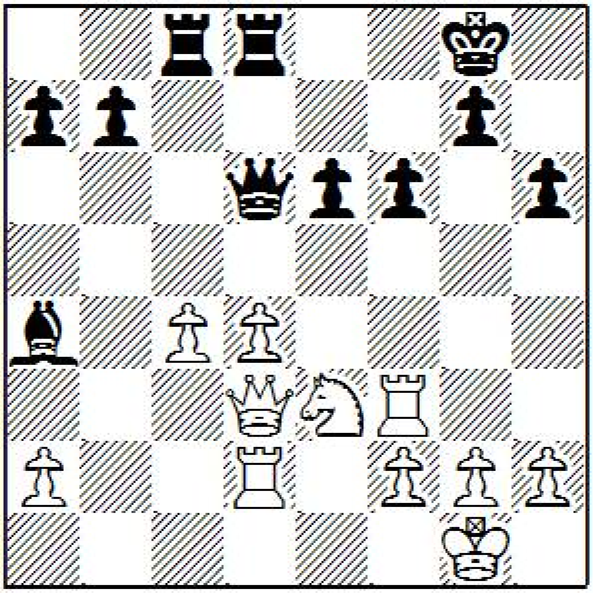
27 ... Ba4!

‘To force the rook from the first rank, which will soon be seized by Black.’ (Lasker)

28 Rf3?

None of the commentators noticed a better chance – 28 Rd2! b5 29 Rf3 (but not 29 cxb5? Rc1+ 30 Nf1 Bxb5 or 30 Nd1 Qxd2 winning) 29 ... Qb8! (29 ... bxc4? 30 Qa3; 29 ... Qc7 30 c5 e5 31 Nf5 exd4 32 Rg3 Qxc5 33 Rxg7+ Kf8 34 g4 Qc1+ 35 Kg2 Bc2 36 Rxc2 Qxc2 37 Qf3 Qxf5 38 Qxf5 Kxg7 39 h4 d3 40 h5 leads to a draw) 30 Qg6! (Steinitz only considered 30 cxb5? Rc1+ 31 Nd1 e5! winning) 30 ... Kh8 (30 ... bxc4? 31 Ng4!) 31 Rg3 (inferior is 31 Rxf6?! Rc7!! 32 Rxe6 bxc4) 31 ... Qb7 32 c5 b4!, and although Black has the advantage, there is still a lot of play to come.

28 ... Qd6 29 Rd2 (29 Rxf6? Bxd1 wins)



29 ... Bc6?

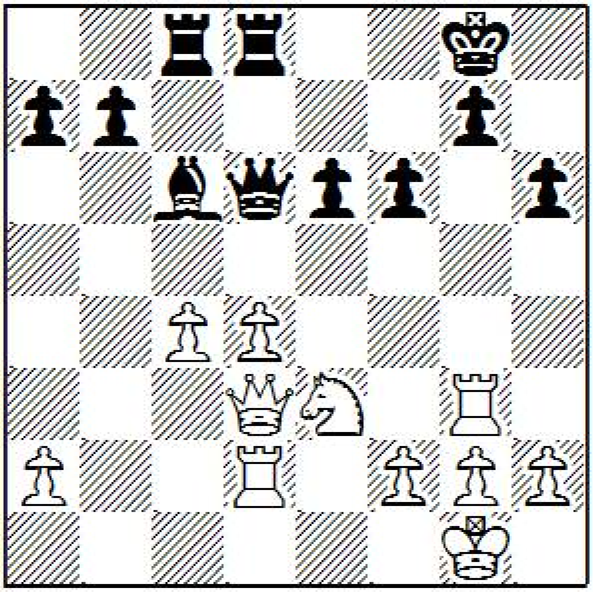
As it transpires from the note to the following move, this is a serious mistake. Much stronger was the tactical blow 29 ... b5! suggested by Vukovic. Now White loses after 30 cxb5? Rc1+ 31 Nf1 (31 Nd1 Qxd4! 32

Qxd4 Rxd4 33 Rxd4 Bxd1) 31 ... Qb4, or 30 Rg3? bxc4 31 Qg6 Qf8 32 Ng4 Kh8 33 Nxh6 Be8! 34 Nf7+ Qxf7, or 30 h3 bxc4 31 Nxc4 Qb4 32 Ne3 Bb5 33 a3 Qa5. And even after the best continuation 30 Qg6 Qe7 31 Rh3 Qf7 all the chances are on Black's side.

30 Rg3?

A mistake in reply, and this time a fatal one. Also bad was 30 Rxf6? gxf6 31 Qg6+ Kf8 32 Qxf6+ Ke8. But 30 d5! suggests itself. 'Steinitz thought that this would be refuted by 30 ... exd5 31 cxd5 Bxd5 32 Nxd5 Qxd5 33 Qxd5+ Rxd5. But instead of 31 cxd5, stronger is 31 Nf5!, for example: 31 ... Qe5? 32 Re3 Qa1+ 33 Rd1 (33 ... Qxa2 34 Nxh6+!), 31 ... Qd7? 32 Rg3 dxc4 33 Nxh6+ Kh8 (33 ... Kf8 34 Qh7) 34 Qg6 Re8 35 h4 wins, or 31 ... Qf8 32 Rg3 dxc4 (*Black can save the game by 32 ... Rd7! 33 Nxh6+ Kh8 34 Ng4 Re8! 35 Ne3 dxc4 36 Qxc4 Qf7 37 Rh3+ Kg8 38 Qh4 Qg6 39 Qc4+ Qf7 with equality – G. K.*) 33 Nxh6+ Kh8 (33 ... Kf8 34 Qh7) 34 Qg6 Re8 35 h4 and wins or 31 ... Qf8 32 Rg3 dxc4 33 Nxh6+ Kh8 34 Qxd8! Rxd8 35 Rxd8 Qxd8 36 Nf7+. Therefore correct is 30 ... Qe5! 31 Rg3 (if 31 Nc2 or 31 Nf1, then ultra-calmly 31 ... exd5) 31 ... exd5 32 Qg6 Rc7 and ... Be8 (of course, not 33 Qxh6? on account of 33 ... Qxg3!).' (Euwe)

In the variation 30 d5! Qe5! the computer introduces its corrections: 31 Qf1! exd5 32 cxd5 Bd7 leads to a rather complicated position, in which White can defend himself at the cost of the initiative. Whereas 30 Rg3? runs up against a wall.



30 ... f5!

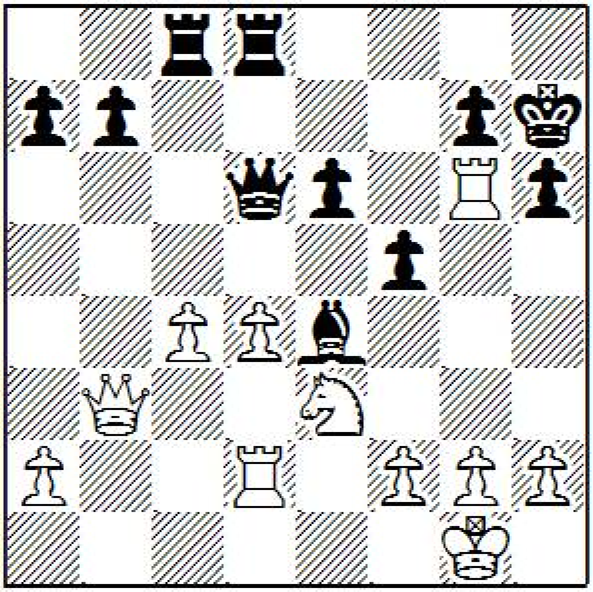
This reply, effectively deciding the game, was underestimated by Zukertort.

31 Rg6?

A coffee-house move! There was more sense in 31 c5 (31 Rh3!?) 31 ... Qe7 32 Nc4 (or 32 f4 Be4 33 Qe2 Qf6 34 Qf2! b6) 32 ... Bb5 33 a4 Bxc4 34 Qxc4 Rxc5 35 dxc5 Rxd2 36 h3 with an indifferent, but not yet totally ruined position.

31 ... Be4 32 Qb3 Kh7

Not 32 ... f4? 33 c5 fxe3 34 cxd6 exd2 35 Qxe6+ Kh7 36 Rxh6+ gxh6 37 Qf7+ Kh8 38 Qf6+ Kg8 39 Qe6+ Kg7 40 Qe7+ with perpetual check, but 32 ... Kf7! 33 c5 Qe7 34 Rg3 f4 35 Rg4 fxe3 would have won calmly.



33 c5 Rxc5 34 Rxe6

Or 34 Qxe6 Rc1+ 35 Nd1 (35 Nf1 Qxe6 36 Rxe6 Bd5 37 Re7 Bc4) 35 ... Qf8! (35 ... Qxe6 36 Rxe6 Bd5 37 Re1 Bxa2 38 Rxa2 Rxd4 Steinitz) 36 Rg3 Bc2 37 Qe2 Qe8 38 Kf1 f4 all of which are winning for Black.

34 ... Rc1+ 35 Nd1?

More tenacious was 35 Nf1, when there is a choice between 35 ... Qf4 36 Qe3 Qc7! and the immediate 35 ... Qc7, for example: 36 Rd1 Rxd1 37 Qxd1 Qd7 38 Re5 Qxd4 39 Qxd4 Rxd4 40 f3 Bc6 41 Ne3 f4 42 Nf5 Rd2 43 Re7 Kg6 and Black has a won endgame.

35 ... Qf4 36 Qb2 Rb1 37 Qc3 Rc8 38 Rxe4 Qxe4 0-1

The game is a very uneven one, and it is hard to annotate from the standpoint of the 21st century: by present-day standards it contains too many mistakes. But it should be remembered that even the best players of that time progressed in the opening and the middlegame purely intuitively, groping their way. And Steinitz was clearly superior to his opponent in positional play, in his understanding of the strength and weakness of central pawns. Nothing was then known about this, and objectively the game played a colossal role in the development of chess understanding. It needed nearly half a century and the appearance of Botvinnik for positions with an 'isolani' to be reassessed in favour of White, and then nearly another 30 years and the appearance of Petrosian, for the Queen's Gambit Accepted to again become a popular opening and for players to begin relating to the ‘isolani’ without emotion, seeing in it both minuses and pluses. And now there prevails a concrete and complex approach, based on a gigantic amount of processed information ...

In the match too the ninth game played an enormous role. The scores became level (+4 -4 =1), and although in the event of a 9-9 score the players had agreed to continue playing to a further eight wins, the play was now all one way. In New Orleans, with the score standing at 5-7 and after failing to win the almost won 17th game and losing the 18th, Zukertort completely collapsed, and within two more games Steinitz was celebrating overall victory: +10 -5 =5. The first official champion of the world had emerged.

The press greeted Steinitz’s triumph coolly: it was said that Zukertort was ‘not at all himself’, that there were rather a lot of blunders and, by contrast, little in the way of brilliance. They remembered with delight the times of Morphy and Anderssen, completely ignoring the path that chess had taken over a quarter of a century, forgetting that Steinitz and Zukertort played an order of magnitude stronger that any opponent of their legendary predecessors, and therefore their internecine clash, like many subsequent battles for the crown, demanded incomparably greater nervous tension ...

But why did Zukertort ‘burn up’ so quickly? It seems to me that after the first third of the match Steinitz had fully adapted to him, adjusted to his playing style and discovered his own (which was not easy: Zukertort was after all an excellent practitioner) – and he could now do with him what he wanted, playing chess that was incomprehensible to his opponent! And gradually Zukertort lost his nerve. and a feeling of hopelessness arose: he simply did not know what to do with Steinitz ...

Many years later Lasker called this match ‘an event which decided the outcome of the battle between the combinative and positional schools,’ and gave a very clear description of it: ‘How novel, how surprising, how opposed to every sentiment of his time the conceptions of Steinitz must have been becomes manifest when playing over the games of the greatest match won by him, the one against Zukertort. Zukertort relied on combinations, and in that field he was a discoverer, a genius. For all that, in the majority of the games of the match, though he had lost none of his faculty, he was unable to make use of it. Steinitz seemed to have the mysterious capacity for divining combinations long before they were realisable on the board, to encourage combinations favourable to himself and to forestall those which were unfavourable. Zukertort could not understand how Steinitz was able to prevent combinations nor how he could win by such a method, since up to that time – this seemed to Zukertort indisputable – games, fairly won, had been won by fine combinations. Zukertort tried for four years to solve this riddle, but he never approached its solution by even one step, and he lost the mastery that he possessed into the bargain. He died a comparatively young man (*of a stroke at the age of 46 – G. K.*). And thus it is not to be wondered at that the chess world did not understand Steinitz, neither his manner of play nor his written word which treated of his "modern school".'

Chigorin – The First Challenger

In 1888 the rich Havana Chess Club, with which Steinitz had good relations, invited the champion to choose his most worthy opponent and to play the next match for the world championship in Cuba. Steinitz immediately agreed, and without any hesitation named Chigorin.

At that time the great Russian master Mikhail Ivanovich Chigorin (1850-1908) still had only a short service record, but he was the most difficult, the most dangerous opponent for the champion: in Vienna 1882 he had drawn 1-1 with Steinitz, and in London 1883 he had won both games against him! In addition he spoke out as a fundamental critic and opponent of Steinitz, who, in turn, called him 'a genius of practical play, who regards it as his privilege at every convenient opportunity to challenge the principles of modern chess theory.' Chigorin played in sharp combinative style, he was a virtuoso of various gambits, and later, when a whole generation of followers of the new school came into the arena, he won fame as 'the last chess romantic'.

Mikhail Ivanovich learned chess at the age of 16, and began playing seriously only when he was 24, in the well-known Dominik Café in St Petersburg. For the sake of chess he gave up his job and from 1876 he edited the magazine *Shakhmatny Listok* (and in the mid-80s *Shakhmatny Vestnik*). After winning matches against the leading Russian masters, he became the strongest player in the country for a quarter of a century. He was distinguished by an amazingly vivid, but nevertheless, unusual style of play.

Game 19

M.Chigorin-E.Schiffers

Match, St Petersburg 1879

Ruy Lopez C68

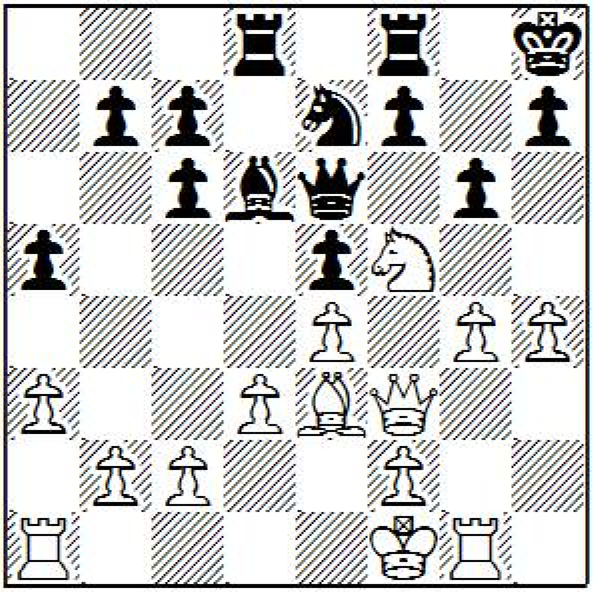
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6

This is much drier than Chigorin's beloved Evans Gambit, but even here, as it turns out, it is possible to stir up trouble.

4 ... dxc6 5 Nc3 Bc5 6 d3 Bg4 7 h3 Bxf3 8 Qxf3 Ne7 9 Ne2 0-0 10 g4!? Qd7 11 Be3 Bb4+ 12 Kf1!?

Together with 10 g4, this is an original way of preparing an attack.

12 ... Rad8 13 Ng3 Qe6 14 h4 a5 15 Rg1 Kh8 16 Nf5 g6 17 a3 Bd6



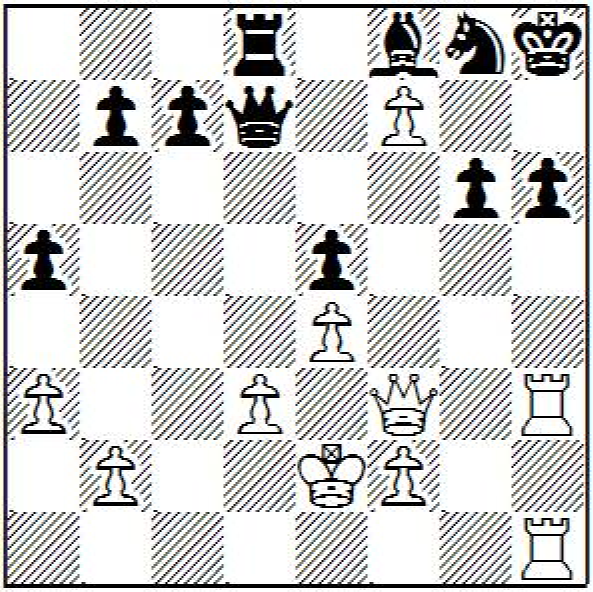
18 Ke2!

This very modern knight sacrifice is an example of Chigorin's paradoxical thinking.

18 ... gxf5?! (18 ... c5!? with the idea of ... c5-c4 is more cautious) **19 gxf5 Qd7 20 Bh6!?**

Perhaps Schiffers was hoping for 20 Qg4 Nxf5 21 Qxf5 Qxf5 22 exf5 with a very slightly better endgame for White. But Chigorin does not fritter away his advantage.

20 ... Rg8 21 Bg5 Rxg5 22 hxg5 c5 23 Rh1 Ng8 24 f6 Bf8 25 Rh3 c4! 26 Rah1 cxd3+ 27 cxd3 (27 Qxd3 h6) **27 ... h6 28 g6 fxg6 29 f7**



29 ... Ne7??

The computer records this as a blunder. After 29 ... Qd4! 30 fxg8Q+ Kxg8 it was still possible to resist: 31 Rg3 Qxb2+ 32 Kf1 Rd6 33 Qf5 Kg7 34 Rhg1 Qc1+ 35 Kg2 Qf4 36 Qc8 Qf7 etc.

30 Rxh6+ Bxh6 31 f8Q+ Rxf8 32 Qxf8+ Ng8 33 Rxh6+ 1-0

After his debut in the world arena (Berlin 1881: 1. Blackburne; 2. Zukertort; 3-4 Winawer and Chigorin) Chigorin won universal recognition. ‘His combinations are very clever,’ wrote Zukertort. ‘With one leap he has joined the ranks of international masters.’

In the spring of 1889, returning home from his first match with Steinitz (their duels will be described below), Chigorin shared 1st-2nd place at an important tournament in New York, the longest in the history of chess (64 days: a double-round event with 20 players), where he played one of his best-known games.

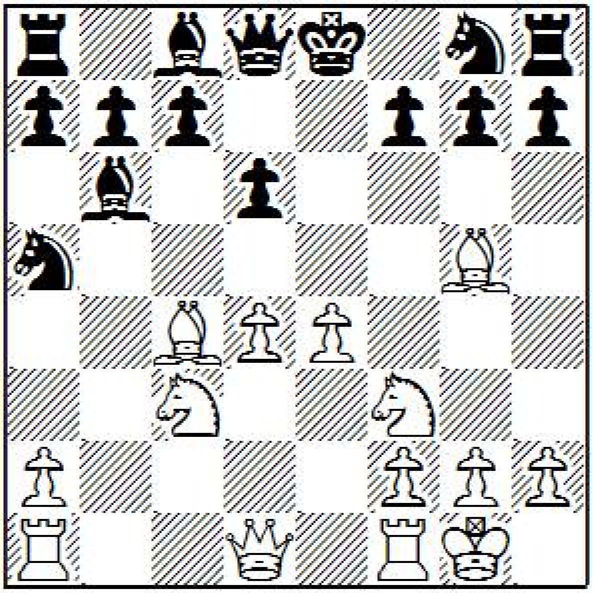
Game 20

M.Chigorin-W.Pollock

Sixth American Congress, New York 1889

Evans Gambit C51

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Bc5?! (5 ... Ba5; 5 ... Be7) **6 0-0** (6 d4!) **6 ... d6 7 d4 exd4?!** (7 ... Bb6! – *Game No.43*) **8 cxd4 Bb6 9 Nc3 Na5 10 Bg5!**

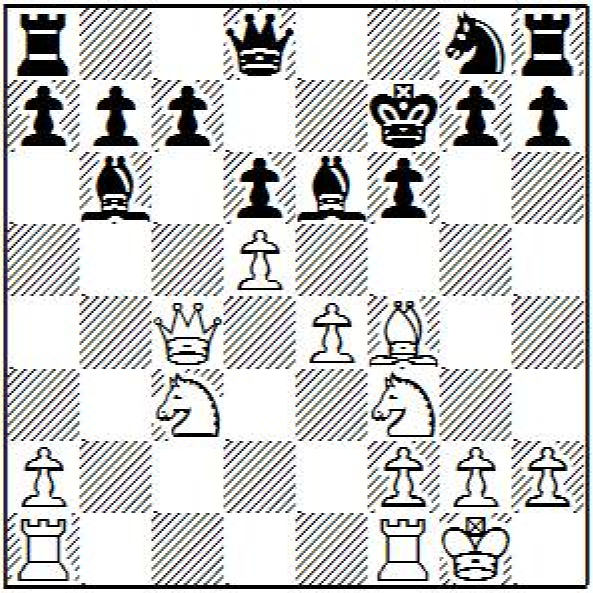


This, the ‘Göring Attack’ was a *tabiya* of Mikhail Chigorin, his favourite position.

10 ... f6 11 Bf4!?

Less convincing is 11 Bh4 Nxc4 12 Qa4+ Qd7 13 Qxc4 Qf7 14 Nd5 Nh6 (Chigorin-Yakubovich, correspondence 1879).

11 ... Nxc4 12 Qa4+ Kf7 13 Qxc4+ Be6 14 d5!



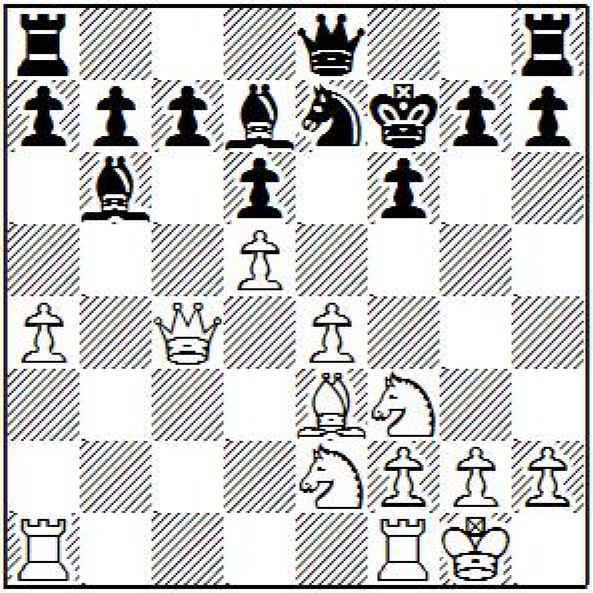
14 ... Bd7

‘After 14 ... Bg4 Black has to reckon with a piece sacrifice for the sake of an attack: 15 e5! (*? – G.K.*) 15 ... fxe5 16 Nxe5+ dxe5 17 Bxe5.’ (Vasyukov, Nikitin) Excuse me: after the simple 17 ... Nf6! and the approximate 18 Bxf6 Qxf6 19 Qxg4 Qxc3 White has got nowhere. Whereas the ‘positional offensive’ 15 Nd4! and a2-a4 gives him excellent compensation for the pawn.

15 Ne2 Qe8?!

A loss of time. ‘It was better to develop the kingside by 15 ... Ne7 and ... Re8 or ... Rf8. The queen should have been reserved for a better post.’ (Steinitz) After this there would evidently have followed 16 a4 with a complicated game.

16 a4! Ne7 17 Be3!



17 ... Ng6

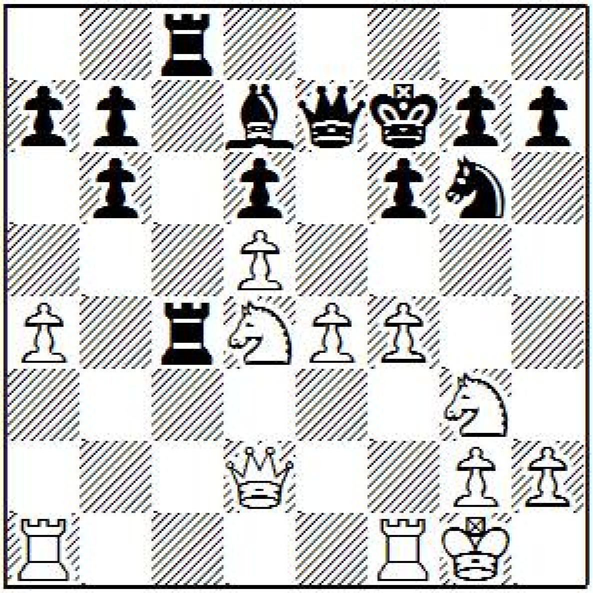
Steinitz suggested the tenacious but passive 17 ... Qd8 18 Bxb6 axb6, while to me 17 ... Rc8!? seems interesting.

18 Bxb6 cxb6 19 Qb4 Qe7

19 ... Bg4 20 Rac1 Bxf3 (20 ... Qe7 21 Ng3) does not work on account of 21 Rc7+ Kg8 22 gxf3 Nh4 23 Ng3 Nxf3+ 24 Kg2 Nh4+ 25 Kh1 with an attack.

20 Ng3 Rhc8 21 Nd4 Rc5 22 f4 Rac8 23 Qd2 Rc4

After Steinitz's move 23 ... Nf8, forestalling the invasion of the white knight at e6, 24 Rae1 is unpleasant with the dangerous threat of Ngf5 and possibly e4-e5 (Vasyukov, Nikitin). My alternative is 23 ... Kg8!? 24 Ngf5 (24 Ne6 Rc2) 24 ... Bxf5 25 exf5 Nf8.



24 Ne6! Nh4

Clearly, Black cannot take twice on e6 on account of the fork f4-f5. ‘But perhaps it was worth trying to disrupt the attack by giving up the exchange: 24 ... Rc2 25 Qxc2! Rxc2 26 Nf5 Bxe6 27 Nxe7 Nxe7 28 dxe6+ Kxe6.’ (Vasyukov, Nikitin) And indeed, the position after 29 Rfc1 Rc5 does not look altogether clear.

25 Qd1! Bxe6?

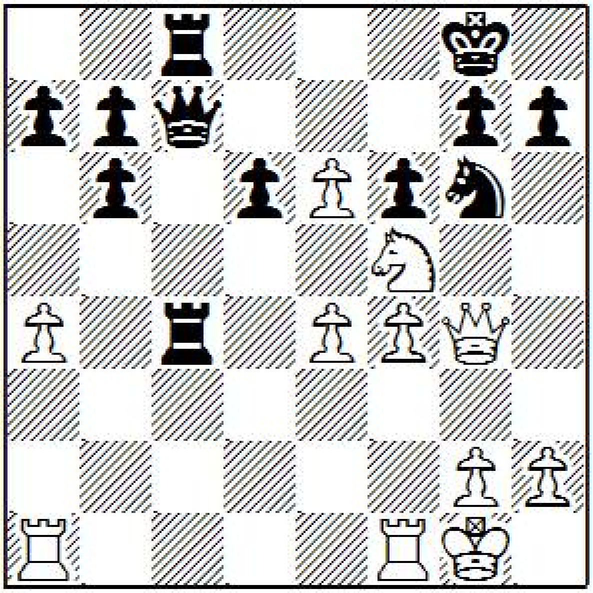
In my opinion, a serious mistake, and one that was not mentioned by the commentators. 25 ... Kg8! should have been played, and if 26 Qg4 – 26 ... f5 27 exf5 (27 Nxf5 Nxf5 28 exf5 Qf6) 27 ... Rc2.

26 dxe6+ Kg8 27 Qg4!

‘The king’s side attack is congenial to Mr Chigorin’s style and he pursues it here with consummate mastery.’ (Steinitz) However, also good was 27 f5!? g5 28 Rf2 (28 fxg6!?) with the threat of 29 Rd2 followed by e4-e5 (Vasyukov, Nikitin).

27 ... Ng6 28 Nf5! Qc7

Of course, not 28 ... Qxe6?? 29 Nh6+!



29 e7!?

The culmination of the battle. ‘Everything serves the purpose of the attack on the king. The knight at g6 is pinned and the terrible h2-h4-h5 is threatened. However, many masters of the later “cautious” times would have been unlikely to detach from its neighbours this far-advanced pawn, which guarantees victory.’ (Spielmann)

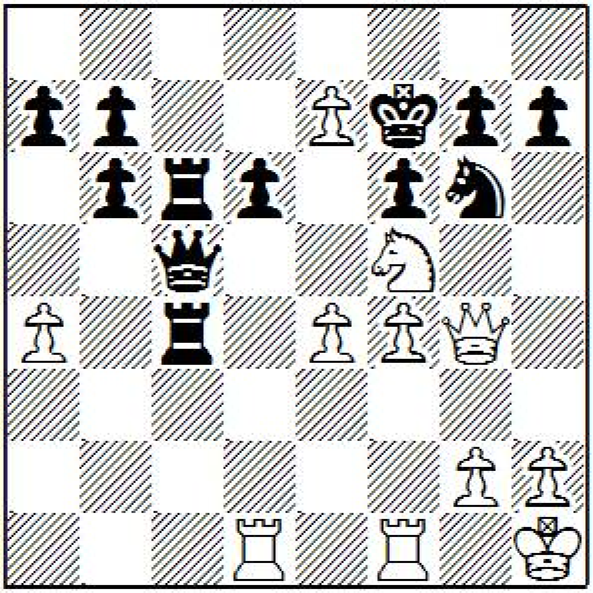
‘After the direct 29 h4?! Black has the defence 29 ... Rxe4 30 h5 Ne5! 31 Qg3 Nc4 and ... Qc5+, but after 29 Rae1! followed by the march of the h-pawn Black would appear to have no defence.’ (Vasyukov, Nikitin).

29 ... Kf7?

The decisive mistake. Far more tenacious was Steinitz’s suggestion of 29 ... Re8! (but not 29 ... Rxe4? 30 Nxd6). In the variation of Vasyukov and Nikitin 30 h4 Rxe7 31 h5 Nf8 32 Nxe7+ Qxe7 33 Rac1!? Qxe4 34 Rce1! Qd4+ 35 Kh1 the outcome remains unclear. Therefore I suggest 32 h6! g6 33 Nxe7+ Qxe7 34 Rae1 Rxe4 35 Qd1 and White’s position is better.

30 Rad1 Qc5+ 31 Kh1 Rc6

This results in a fatal weakening of the eighth rank.



32 e5!!

A breakthrough at the most fortified point! True, in the opinion of the computer, White also wins by the cold 32 e8Q+!? Kxe8 33 Nxg7+ Kf7 34 Qd7+ Ne7 35 Ne6 Qh5 36 Nd8+.

32 ... fxe5 (also pretty was 32 ... dxe5 33 Rd8 Re6 34 Rf8+! or 32 ... Qxe5 33 Nxd6+! Rxd6 34 fxe5)

33 Nxd6+

The commentators attach an exclamation mark to this ‘crushing blow’, although 33 e8Q+!? Kxe8 34 Nxg7+ Kf7 35 Qd7+ would have concluded matters immediately.

33 ... Rxd6 34 fxe5+ Rf6 35 e8Q+! Kxe8 36 Qd7+ Kf8 37 exf6 1-0

‘The grandiosity of Chigorin’s ideas is enchanting: his every move breathes with creative force and an irresistible will to win.’ (Spielmann)

In this type of complicated, dynamic play Mikhail Ivanovich was superior to his contemporaries. He had a very subtle feeling for the initiative and he was not afraid to sacrifice material. Anderssen too played successfully in positions where he was material down, but in his time the standard of defence was still very weak. Chigorin overcame far more serious resistance! In many respects his style was the forerunner of Alekhine’s style, and in the mid-20th century the young Spassky – a great connoisseur of Chigorin’s games – played in a similar manner ...

Here is another classic game by Chigorin, from the ‘final candidates match’ with Gunsberg (Havana 1890). Although this fierce clash ended in a draw (+9 -9 =5), the Russian master’s play created by far the stronger impression.

Game 21

I.Gunsberg-M.Chigorin

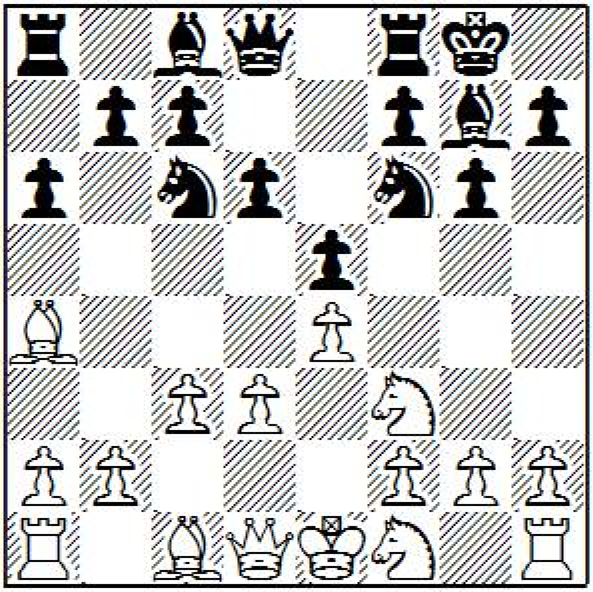
Match, Havana 1890, 2nd game

Ruy Lopez C77

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6

In his second match with Steinitz (Havana 1892) Chigorin preferred 3 ... Nf6 4 d3 d6 5 c3 g6 6 Nbd2 Bg7 7 Nf1 0-0 8 Ne3 d5! or 8 Ba4 d5!?, but not 8 ... Nd7?! (*Game No. 25*).

4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 d6 6 c3 g6 7 Nbd2 Bg7 8 Nf1 0-0



9 h3?!

Inappropriate flank activity, which is parried by a counter in the centre.

9 ... d5!

The position is even more favourable for Black than in the aforementioned games with Steinitz, where there was not the possibility of immediately driving back the bishop by ... b7-b5.

10 Qe2

After 10 Bxc6?! bxc6 11 Nxe5 the simplest is 11 ... Nxe4, although 11 ... Qe8 will also do.

10 ... b5 11 Bc2?!

‘After this the bishop remains shut out of play until the end of the game. It made sense to play 11 Bb3 and only if ... Na5 – Bc2. Then it would have been more difficult for Black to occupy the d4-square.’ (Vasyukov, Nikitin)

11 ... d4! (seizing space) **12 g4 Qd6 13 N1d2**

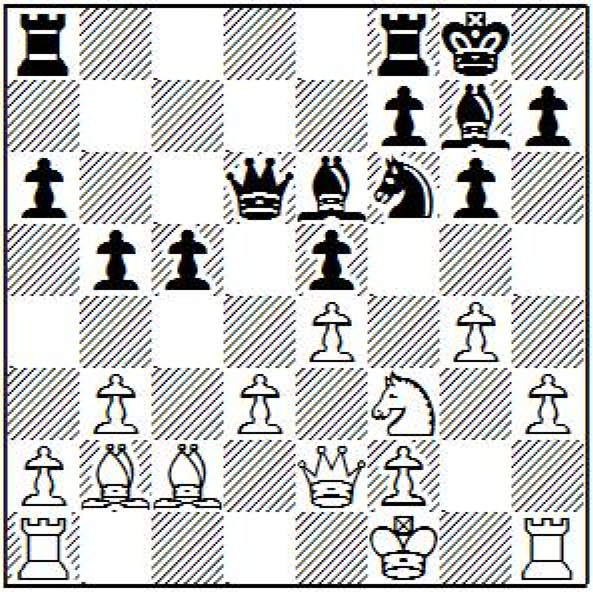
If 13 Ng3, then 13 ... Qc5 is possible, also forcing the capture on d4.

13 ... Be6 14 cxd4

‘If 14 0-0 the immediate 14 ... h5 is possible or first 14 ... Rad8; in any case White’s position is cramped.’ (Chigorin)

14 ... Nxd4 15 Nxd4 Qxd4 16 Nf3 Qb4+ 17 Kf1 Qd6 18 b3 (the advantage is now on the side of Black, for example: 18 d4?! Bc4 19 Bd3 Bxd3 20 Qxd3 Nd7 21 d5 c6! etc.).

18 ... c5 19 Bb2



19 ... Nd7!

The start of a deep manoeuvre, which has now become standard – the knight is aiming for d4. At the same time 20 ... f5! is threatened.

20 Ng5 Nb8! 21 Nxe6 fxe6!

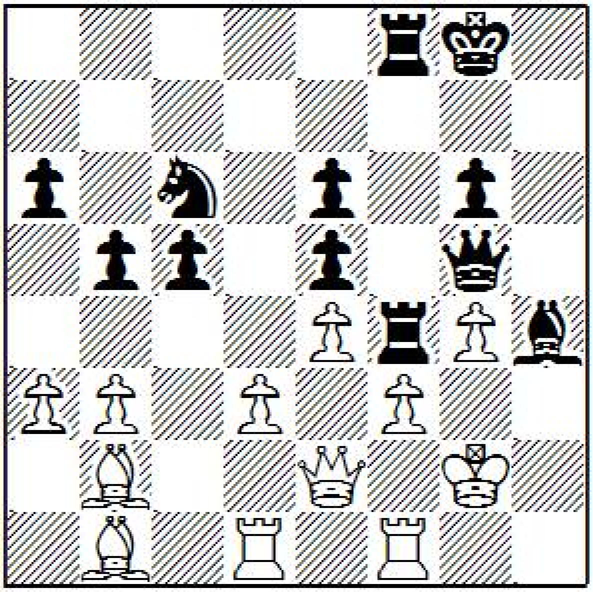
Opening the f-file for an attack is also a textbook procedure in such positions. Black’s advantage is growing.

22 Kg2 Ra7 23 Rhf1 Raf7 24 f3 Nc6 25 Qd2 Rf4 26 Rad1 Qe7 27 Qe1 Bf6 28 Qe2

‘If 28 Bc1 Bh4 29 Qc3 (29 Qe2 Nd4), then 29 ... Rxf3! 30 Rxf3 Rxf3 31 Kxf3 Qf6+ 32 Kg2 Qf2+ 33 Kh1 Qf3+ and mate in three moves.’ (Chigorin)

28 ... Bh4 29 Bb1 h5! 30 a3 hxg4 31 hxg4 Qg5!

With the deadly threat of 32 ... Rxf3! 33 Rxf3 Qxg4+.



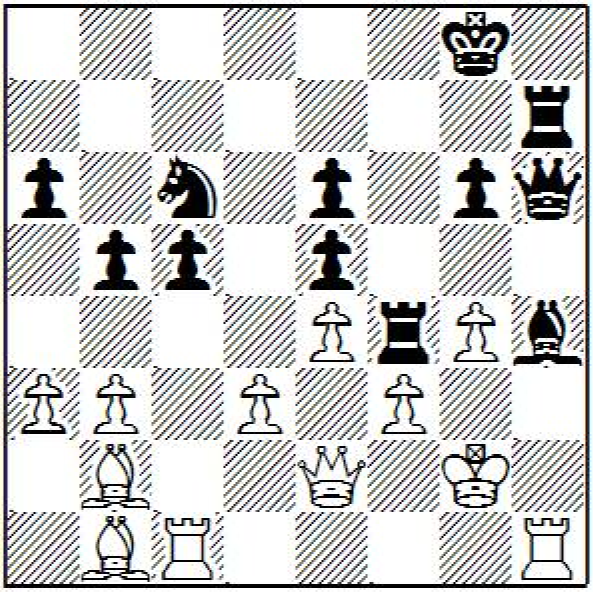
32 Kh3

Also bad is 32 Bc1 Nd4! 33 Bxf4 Rxf4 34 Qb2 Nxf3 35 Kh1 Qxg4 36 Qg2 Qh5 when White can resign.

32 ... R8f7! 33 Rc1

Or 33 Bc1 Rh7! 34 Bxf4 Bg3+! 35 Kg2 Rh2+ 36 Kg1 Qxf4 and wins. The weakness of the dark squares and the bad placing of his pieces renders White’s position hopeless.

33 ... Qh6 34 Kg2 Rh7 (threatening ... Be1!) **35 Rh1**



35 ... Rxf3!!

‘A charming mastercoup of the rarest profundity and brilliancy.’ (Steinitz) ‘It could have been created only by a great master.’ (Gunsberg) It is indeed very spectacular!

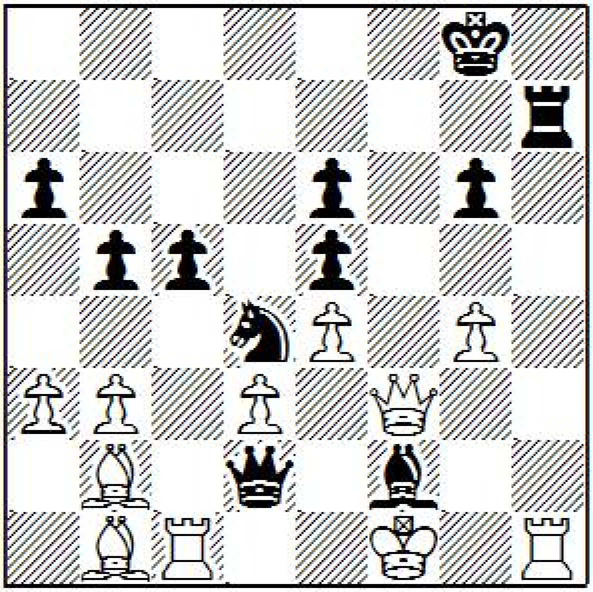
36 Qxf3

‘If 36 Rxh4, then 36 ... Rg3+! 37 Kxg3 Qxh4+ 38 Kf3 Qh3+ 39 Kf2 Rf7+ 40 Ke1! Qg3+ 41 Kd1 Rf2 winning the queen.’ (Chigorin) However, also good enough is the simple 36 ... Qxh4 37 Kxf3 Qh3+ 38 Kf2 Qh2+ 39 Ke1 Qg3+ 40 Kd1 Rh1+ 41 Kd2 Rh2.

36 ... Qd2+ 37 Kg1 Bf2+

They all attach an exclamation mark to this move, although 37 ... Nd4!? 38 Bxd4 Bf2+ was also good.

38 Kf1 (38 Qxf2 Rxh1+ 39 Kg2 Rh2+) **38 ... Nd4!**



The final stroke – on the theme of overloading.

39 Bxd4 Qxc1+ 40 Ke2 Rxh1 41 Bxf2 Qxb1 42 g5 Qf1+ 0-1

A splendid, complete game – ‘the pearl of the match’, as it was described by the commentators.

Chigorin won a number of other momentous games (sixth, 20th) against Gunsberg, which also became a step forward in the development of chess. But, strangely enough, their match ended in a draw. What told was an unusual phenomenon of Chigorin: he could play on the whole more interestingly, more vividly and more strongly than his opponent, but his unsure handling of certain types of positions and crude oversights would reduce his creative superiority to nought.

Such was the world champion’s main opponent in the late 1880s to the early 1890s. ‘He stands as though apart from the ranks of 19th century masters, he is a special figure,’ thought Alekhine. ‘Chigorin’s talent is enormous, and possibly he is a real genius. At times the depth of his ideas can be inaccessible to mere mortals.’

Under the Havana Sun

The first Steinitz-Chigorin match (Havana 1889) was played to the best of 20 games and was extremely uncompromising: there was only one draw, and that a bloody one, in the final game. Chigorin won at the start and was leading after seven games, then suffered three successive defeats, won back one point, but ... again lost three in a row and it was all over: Steinitz won the match 10½-6½.

This was what the world champion wrote immediately afterwards:

‘This was a match between an old master of the young school and a young master of the old school, and the young school won, despite the age of its master. The young master of the old school sacrificed pawns and pieces. The old master of the young school went further – he sacrificed entire games, to demonstrate what he understood by sound positional principles. And I think it has to be admitted that I paid quite a high price for my experiments, by carrying them out in a fierce match struggle under the pressure of restricted time, and also without any preliminary testing in practice. Therefore my adventures in defence against the Evans Gambit cost me, at the least, five out of the seven lost games; but I am satisfied by the fact that I nevertheless managed to win four games and draw one (*here the post-match consultation games have also been included – G. K.*), which is not such an insignificant success, if account is taken of the novelty and difficulty of the experiment.’

Using examples from the match, I should like to confirm the validity of Steinitz’s words and his amazing obstinacy when playing Black.

Game 22

M.Chigorin-W.Steinitz

World Championship, Havana 1889, 17th game

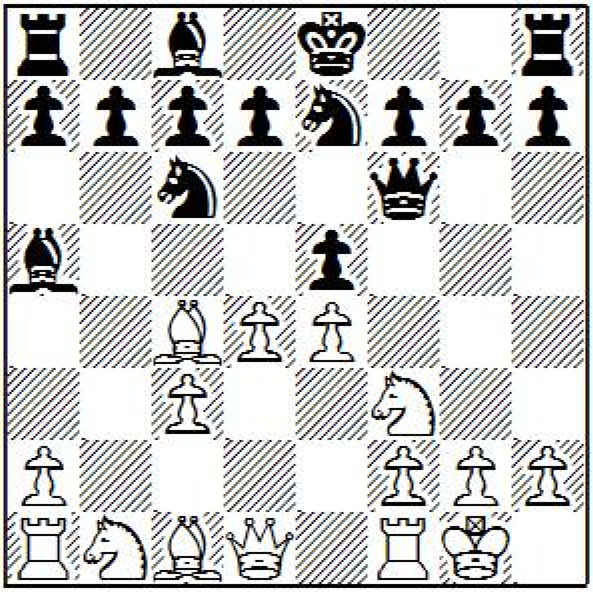
Evans Gambit C52

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Ba5

It is good at least that he didn’t play 5 ... Bf8?! 6 d4 Qe7?! 7 0-0 d6 8 Qb3 g6 9 dxe5 dxe5 10 Rd1 Bh6 11 Nbd2! Qf6 12 Ba3 Nge7 13 Bd5! with an agonising death on the 41st move (Chigorin-Steinitz, Vienna 1882).

6 0-0 (before Lasker it was not known that 6 d4! is more accurate) **6 ... Qf6?!** (6 ... d6 7 d4 Bb6! – *Game No.43*) **7 d4 Nge7**

An artificial defence, which before this Steinitz called ‘in principle correct and sound’, and even ‘the best’, but for some reason, with the exception of one instance, he did not employ it on any subsequent occasions ...



8 d5!

In the first game Steinitz lost after 8 Ng5?!, but not on account of the opening. The aforementioned ‘instance’ was 8 Qa4?! Bb6 9 Bg5 Qd6 10 Na3 exd4 11 Nb5 Qg6 12 cxd4 a6 13 d5 Ne5 14 Nxe5 Qxg5 15 Nf3 Qh6 16 Bb3 0-0 17 Rac1 c6 18 Nbd4 c5 19 Ne2 d6, and Black gradually won (Gunsberg-Steinitz, 18th matchgame 1890/91).

8 ... Nd8 9 Qa4!

Less accurate is 9 Bg5 Qd6 10 Qa4, but the world champion was able to demonstrate this only after two defeats:

1) 10 ... Bb6?! 11 Na3 Qg6 12 Bxe7 Kxe7 13 Nxe5 Qf6 14 Nf3 Qxc3 15 e5 c6 16 d6+ Kf8 17 Bb3! h6 18 Qh4 g5 19 Qh5 Qd3 20 Rad1! (seventh game);

2) 10 ... b6?! 11 Na3 a6 12 Bd3! Bxc3 13 Rab1! Bb7 (13 ... Qg6 14 Bxe7 Kxe7 15 Qc4) 14 Nc4 Qc5 (14 ... Qg6 15 Bxe7 Kxe7 16 Qa3+) 15 Be3 etc. (11th game);

3) 10 ... f6! (the correct way) 11 Bc1 Bb6 12 Na3 c6 13 Bb3 (13 Rd1!?) 13 ... Bc5 with an unclear game: if 14 Rd1 Black has 14 ... b5 15 Qa5 Nb7 16 Qa6 Nd8 with equal chances (13th game). However, Black avoided the repetition of moves and ... once again lost!

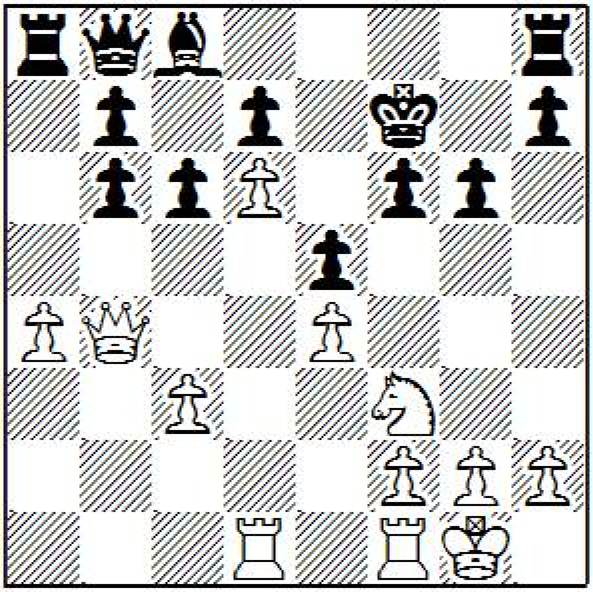
9 ... Bb6 10 Bg5 Qd6 11 Na3 c6 (11 ... f6?! 12 Nb5) **12 Rad1 Qb8**

If 12 ... f6 13 dxc6 Qxc6 14 Nb5!

13 Bxe7 Kxe7 14 d6+ Kf8 15 Qb4!

In the 15th game 15 Nxe5?! was played, after which 15 ... Bc5 was possible. But now White has excellent compensation for the pawn and, what's more, Chigorin is in his element!

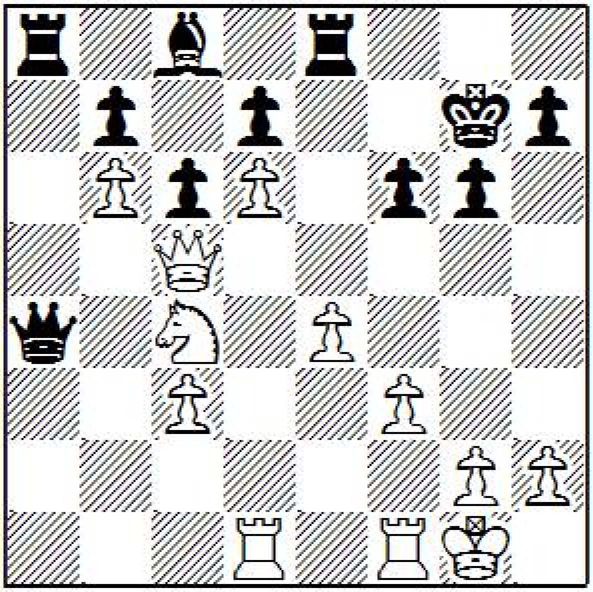
15 ... f6 16 Bb3 g6 17 Nc4 Kg7 18 a4 Nf7 19 Nxb6 axb6 20 Bxf7! Kxf7



21 Nxe5+! (a brilliant stroke!) **21 ... Kg7**

If 21 ... fxe5 White wins by 22 f4! with the deadly opening of the f-file.

22 Nc4 b5 23 axb5 Qa7 24 b6 Qa4 25 Qc5 Re8 26 f3



And with the locked-in bishop at c8 Chigorin should have easily won, then he nearly lost (what jumps there were in the standard of play!), and in the end the two players ‘tired by the sun’ agreed a draw on the 71st move. This was the final game.

Impartial statistics show that Steinitz’s victory in the match was secured by his enormous advantage playing White (+7 -1), achieved with the help of the rigorous **1 Nf3** (epistle to Kramnik!), in the main after **1 ... d5 2 d4 Bg4 3 Ne5 Bh5 4 Qd3 Qc8 5 c4** (second game), **3 c4! Bxf3?! 4 gxf3** (fourth and sixth games), **3 ... Nc6 4 e3 e5 5 Qb3! Bxf3 6 gxf3** (10th and 14th games) and **4 ... e6 5 Nc3 Bb4 6 Bd2 Nge7 7 Bd3 Bf5 8 Bxf5 Nxf5 9 cxd5 exd5 10 Qb3 Bxc3 11 Bxc3 Rb8 12 0-0 0-0 13 Rac1** (12th game). The theory of the original Chigorin Defence (cf. *Game No.31*) made its first, timid steps ...

Another worthy candidate for the world crown at the time was considered to be the Anglo-Hungarian master Isidor Gunsberg (1854-1930), winner of the tournaments in Hamburg 1885 and Bradford 1888. After drawing a crucial match with Chigorin (Havana 1890), he issued a challenge to Steinitz, and eleven months later they met in a match for the world championship (New York 1890/91). They played to the best of 20 games, and the champion again held his title, winning 10½-8½. The challenger did not seriously threaten the throne, but he showed himself to be a pretty solid positional player: as Tarrasch later wrote, ‘Gunsberg was the first of Steinitz’s opponents to fight against him with his own weapon.’

A year earlier in New York the first volume of Steinitz’s famous opening guide *The Modern Chess Instructor* was published, which also included a thematic article *The modern school and its tendencies* (extracts from this manual were regularly published in Russian chess magazines). In the *Instructor* it was asserted that the best defence in the Evans Gambit after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Ba5 6 0-0 is 6 ... Qf6 7 d4 Nh6!?, and the best retreat in the Two Knights Defence after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ c6 7 dxc6 bxc6 8 Be2 h6 is 9 Nh3!? Incidentally, three quarters of a century later Fischer agreed with this latter assertion, but such a way of playing made Chigorin indignant, and he invited Steinitz to play a mini-match of two games by telegraph with these opening variations (with a time control of three days per move and a break during the match for the world title match with Gunsberg).

Steinitz, as always, accepted the challenge, but it all ended dismally for him: firstly, there are (probably false) stories that the New York police, on learning of the suspicious telegraph encoding, arrested him as a Russian spy, and secondly, Chigorin won both games brilliantly! See what a crushing defeat he inflicted on the champion in the Evans Gambit.

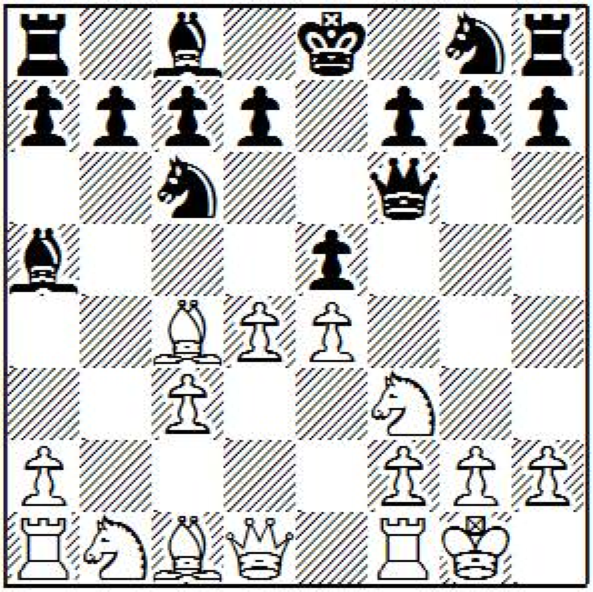
Game 23

M.Chigorin-W.Steinitz

Match by telegraph 1890/91, 1st game

Evans Gambit C52

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Ba5 6 0-0 Qf6?! (6 ... d6!) **7 d4**



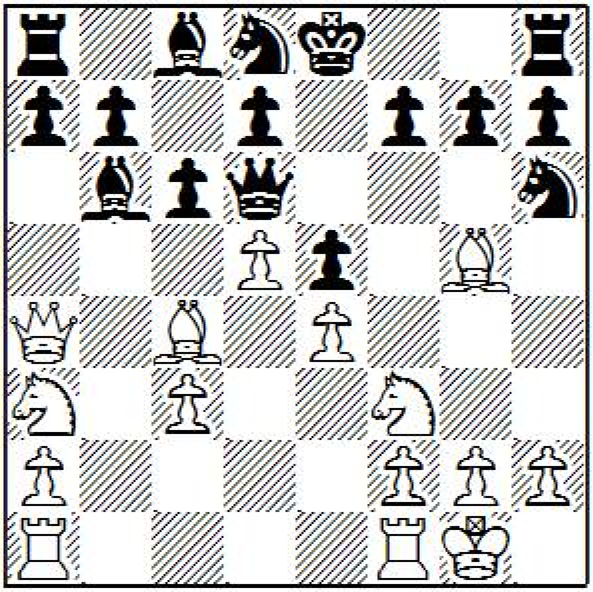
7 ... Nh6

In the 1889 match Steinitz tried to uphold 7 ... Nge7 (*Game No.22*), and against Gunsberg – 7 ... h6, but he did not repeat such experiments any more.

8 Bg5 Qd6

After 8 ... Qg6 9 d5 Nb8 10 Bxh6 Qxh6 11 Nxe5 0-0 12 d6 Nc6 Vasyukov and Nikitin recommend 13 Ng4! Qg6 14 Re1 with the initiative.

9 d5 Nd8 10 Qa4 Bb6 11 Na3 c6 (11 ... 0-0 12 Bd3! Qg6 13 Nc4 etc.)



12 Be2!

A subtle manoeuvre: the bishop makes way for the knight.

12 ... Bc7

Or 12 ... Bc5 13 Nc4 Qf8 14 Bxd8 Kxd8 (14 ... b5 15 Qa5 bxc4 16 dxc6) 15 Nfxe5 f6 16 dxc6! etc.

13 Nc4 Qf8

Typical Steinitz! However, also bad were both 13 ... Qc5 14 d6! Bb8 (14 ... Bxd6 15 Be3) 15 Be3 Qb5 16 Qc2 with the threat of Nb6, and 13 ... Qg6 14 Bxd8 Bxd8 15 Nfxe5 Qf6 16 Qa3 Be7 17 d6.

14 d6! (and this is typically Chigorin-like) **14 ... Bxd6**

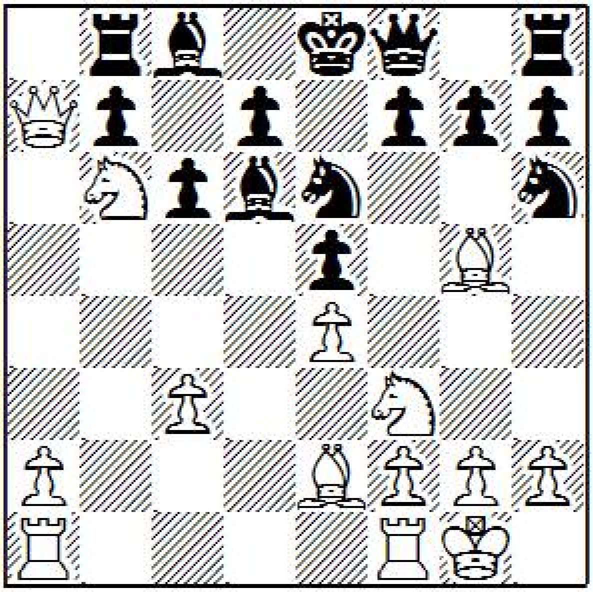
After 14 ... Bb8 15 Be7! or 14 ... b5 15 dxc7 Nb7 16 Qb3 Black loses quickly (16 ... Nc5 17 Qb4 bxc4 18 Qb8!).

15 Nb6 Rb8 16 Qxa7 Ne6

It is typical that the champion also dared to go in for this variation in his match for the chess crown with Gunsberg (New York 1890/91). When in the 12th game the latter employed the Evans Gambit for the first time, before playing 6 ... Qf6?! Steinitz unexpectedly asked: ‘Do you think that I am morally bound to play exactly the same defence as I did against Chigorin?’ Gunsberg replied: ‘You are not exactly bound, but the public will expect you to defend your own theories!’

Alas, after 16 ... Ng4 17 Nh4! Ne6 18 Bxg4 Nxg5 19 Nf5 Ne6 20 Rfd1! Bc7 21 Na8! Rxa8 22 Qxa8 Kd8 23 Rxd7+! Kxd7 24 Rd1+ Black lost ignominiously ...

16 ... Ne6 looks rather more solid, but ... not for a game with a time control of ‘three days for a move’.



17 Bc1!

‘Astounding. This move, like White’s 12th and 14th moves, bears the stamp of genius.’ (Steinitz)

17 ... Ng8 18 Ba3 (with the threat of Qxb8) **18 ... c5 19 Rad1! Nf6**

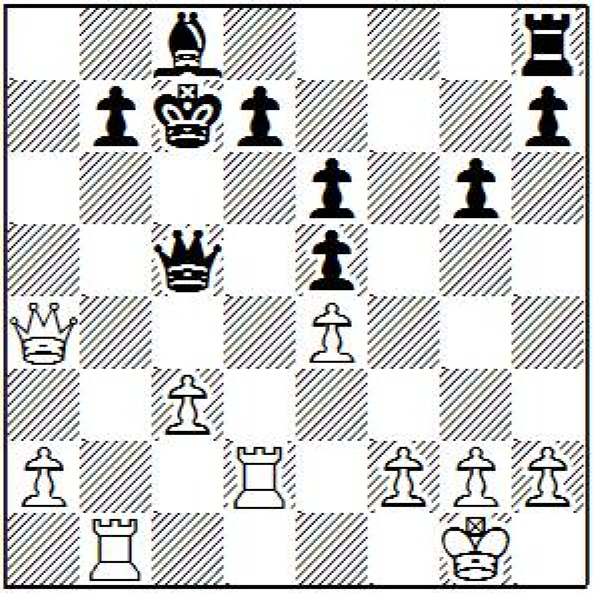
If 19 ... Bc7 Chigorin had prepared 20 Bb5 Nf6 21 Nd5 Bd6 22 Nh4! Nxd5 23 Rxd5 Bc7 24 Nf5 g6 25 Rfd1 gxf5 26 Rxd7 Bxd7 27 Rxd7 Qh6 28 Bxc5! Nxc5 29 Qxc5 Qc1+ 30 Rd1 mate!

20 Bc4 Bc7

Black fails to save the game with 20 ... Nxe4 21 Nxc8 Rxc8 22 Qxb7 Rc6 23 Nxe5 or 20 ... Qe7 21 Bxe6 fxe6 22 Nc4 Bc7 23 Bxc5 and 24 Nd6+.

21 Nd5! Bd6 22 Nh4! Nxd5 23 Nf5! g6 24 Nxd6+ Qxd6 25 Bxd5 Qc7 26 Bxe6 fxe6 27 Bxc5 Ra8 28 Qxa8 Qxc5 29 Qa4 Kd8 30 Rd2 Kc7 31 Rb1!

White accurately converts his clear advantage of the exchange.



31 ... Rd8 (31 ... d6 32 Rb4! etc.) **32 Rb5! Qc6 33 Qb4 d6 34 a4! Qe8** (34 ... Bd7 35 Rxd6!) **35 Rb6 Qf8 36 Qa5 d5** (36 ... Kb8 37 c4) **37 exd5 Kb8 38 d6 1-0**

And the second game became altogether one of the most remarkable in the history of chess: Chigorin played Black with the same inexorable consistency, developed a terrible attack on the king and concluded matters with an unexpected and spectacular queen sacrifice. ‘The games of the telegraph match made a startling impression on me,’ the second world champion Lasker recalled many years later. ‘To crush Steinitz in such a way – this seemed incredible!’

In admitting that his opponent’s victory was deserved, Steinitz wrote: ‘I do not accept my defeat as conclusive evidence against the application of my theories in the two disputed positions, and still less as proofs against the doctrines of the modern school ... The Russian master’s tactics seem to show a conversion to the new ideas, or at any rate that the modern principles have made their impression on his style just like on that of most players of the new generation. Such moves as his twelfth, seventeenth and eighteenth in the Evans Gambit bear the distinct trademark of the modern school ... It was a slow struggle and a wrestling for position, in which the Russian master gained ground on the most approved principles of modern warfare in chess.’

But Mikhail Ivanovich himself did not consider that he belonged to either the old, or the new school, explaining that ‘the geniuses Morphy and Anderssen did not require any abstract understandings,’ and that he, Chigorin, frequently ‘was guided not by abstract theoretical understandings about the comparative strength of the pieces etc., but solely by those facts which seem correct ... after a detailed and if possible accurate analysis. Each move of mine is a feasible conclusion from a number of variations, in the analysis of which theoretical “principles of play” may have only a limited significance.’ Nevertheless Chigorin had a deep respect for Steinitz, which is evident if only from the letter sent to his opponent soon after the telegraph match: ‘True friends of chess must be thankful to you for the interest which you constantly awake with your innovations and for your aversion to schablon-like [stereotyped] play. As known to you I do not share your theory and principles completely, which, however, does not prevent me from appreciating them.’

The telegraph battle provoked an unprecedented surge in the popularity of chess in many countries. Again the question of who was the strongest player in the world became acute. The St Petersburg Chess Society and the Havana Chess Club simultaneously made offers to organise a new Steinitz-Chigorin match for the world championship. The choice of venue was offered to the champion, and he chose Havana.

The match began on 1 January 1892 in the luxurious building of the ‘Centro Asturiano’ Club. On this occasion the winner was to be the first to win 10 games, and in the event of 9-9, a further three. The stake ($2000) and the time control duplicated the ‘original source’ Steinitz-Zukertort. The champion was now nearly 56, and he announced that this would possibly be his last match ... In the first game the challenger played, as usual, 1 e4, and the world saw another ‘parade of Captain Evans’!

Game 24

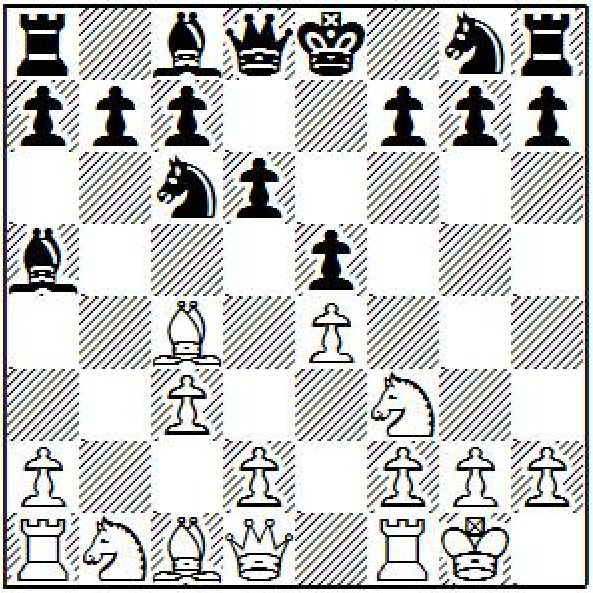
M.Chigorin-W.Steinitz

World Championship, Havana 1892, 1st game

Evans Gambit C52

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Ba5 6 0-0 (6 d4!) **6 ... d6!**

Away with 6 ... Qf6?!



7 d4 Bg4

Best of all is Lasker’s 7 ... Bb6! (*Game No.43*), but 7 ... Bd7 8 Qb3 Qf6 9 dxe5 dxe5 10 Rd1 h6 is also more or less sound (seventh and ninth games). The two players also tried 7 ... exd4 8 cxd4 Bb6 9 Nc3 Na5 10 Bg5 f6 11 Bf4 Nxc4 12 Qa4+ Qd7 13 Qxc4 Qf7 14 Nd5! with a dangerous attack (London 1883) and 8 ... Nf6 9 e5 dxe5 10 Ba3 Be6 11 Bb5 Qd5 12 Qa4 with the initiative (Hastings 1895; St Petersburg 1895/96).

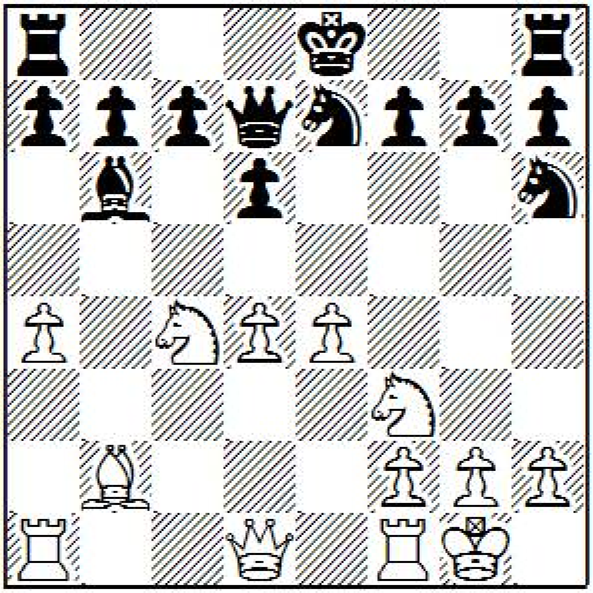
8 Bb5?!

Later Chigorin was twice successful with 8 Qa4, although after 8 ... exd4 9 cxd4 a6! (15th game) or 8 ... Bxf3 9 gxf3 exd4 10 cxd4 (17th game) 10 ... Qf6! Black should not have any opening problems.

8 ... exd4 9 cxd4 Bd7 10 Bb2 Nce7?

At what a price does Steinitz arrive at the chess truth! Of course, correct was 10 ... Nf6! 11 Na3 and here not 11 ... 0-0 12 d5 Ne7 or 12 ... Nb8, which brought Black draws in the third and fifth games, but 11 ... Nxe4! 12 d5 Ne7 13 Qa4 Bc3! 14 Rab1 Bxb2 15 Rxb2 Nc5 with a decisive material advantage (13th game).

11 Bxd7+ Qxd7 12 Na3! Nh6 13 Nc4 Bb6 14 a4!

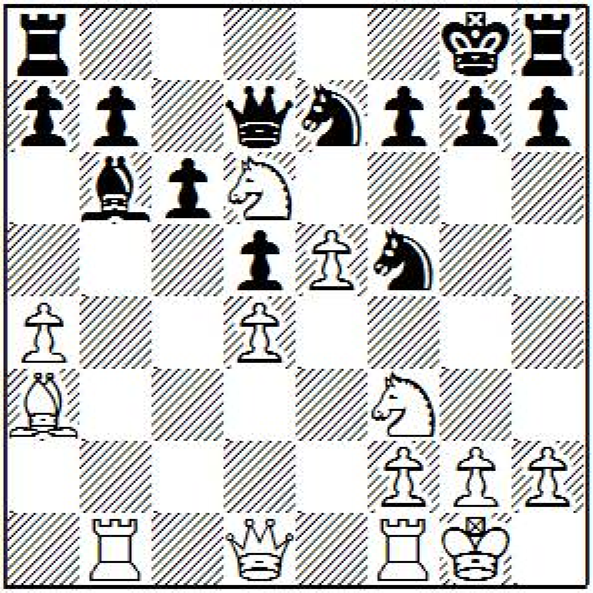


14 ... c6 (14 ... a6 15 Qb3!; 14 ... a5 15 Nxb6 cxb6 16 Qb3 Nc8 17 d5) **15 e5! d5**

No better was 15 ... dxe5 16 dxe5! Qxd1 17 Raxd1 0-0 18 Rd7 or 15 ... Bc7 16 exd6 Bxd6 17 Nxd6+ Qxd6 18 Ba3 and 19 Re1.

16 Nd6+ Kf8 17 Ba3 Kg8 18 Rb1! Nhf5?!

If 18 ... Nc8, 19 a5! Nxd6 20 exd6 Bxa5 21 Ne5 Qc8 22 d7 Qc7 23 Qh5 Bb6 24 Be7 wins, but 18 ... Rb8 was more tenacious.



19 Nxf7! (much bolder than the obvious 19 a5; this knight sacrifice was published right round the world) **19 ... Kxf7 20 e6+ Kxe6 21 Ne5 Qc8**

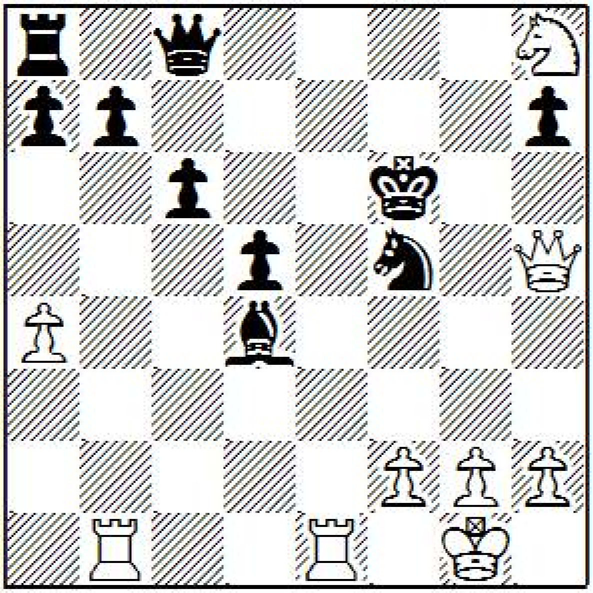
Or 21 ... Qe8 22 Re1 Kf6 23 Bxe7+! etc.

22 Re1 Kf6 23 Qh5! g6 (23 ... Ng6 24 g4!) **24 Bxe7+ Kxe7**

Of course, not 24 ... Nxe7? 25 Qh4+ g5 26 Ng4+ Kf7 27 Qxg5.

25 Nxg6+ Kf6 26 Nxh8 Bxd4

Equally dismal was 26 ... Qxh8 27 Re5 Qc8 28 g4 or 26 ... Qd7 27 Rb3! Rxh8 28 Rf3 Rg8 29 Re5 Rg5 30 Qh6+ Rg6 31 Rexf5+ Qxf5 32 Qf8+.



27 Rb3 Qd7 28 Rf3 Rxh8 29 g4 Rg8 30 Qh6+ Rg6 31 Rxf5+ 1-0

In view of 31 ... Qxf5 32 Qf8+ Black resigned.

Again a horrible defeat ... Fortunately for the champion, after this he gained some respite in the form of two draws and by the fourth game he had completely restored his mental balance. That day the chess world finally saw the real Steinitz!

According to his teaching, a flank attack should be parried by a counter in the centre, and therefore it can prove successful only with a closed or well supported centre. It was this that Steinitz demonstrated in the following game, the great depth of which lies not in the pretty concluding attack, but in where this attack arose, its source. It was here that the difference between the opponents in the understanding of position was revealed. Of course, Chigorin was more ‘advanced’ than Zukertort, and he played chess on a broader scale, but even he could not compete with Steinitz in positional play! It is an amazing game, inexplicable for the 19th century: Steinitz appeared to manoeuvre on the first three ranks, but everywhere things turned out badly for Black. In a quiet, semi-closed position his problems piled up like a snowball ...

Game 25

W.Steinitz-M.Chigorin
World Championship, Havana 1892, 4th game
Ruy Lopez C65

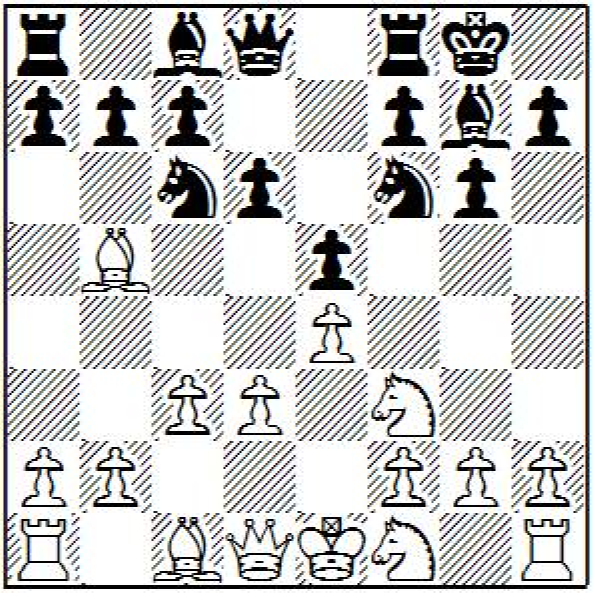
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d3

Not aiming for an opening advantage.

4 ... d6 5 c3 g6

A game from the Steinitz-Lasker match (USA/Canada 2nd matchgame 1894) went 5 ... Bd7 6 Ba4 g6 7 Nbd2 Bg7 8 Nc4 0-0 9 Ne3 Ne7 10 Bb3 c6, and after 11 h4! Qc7 12 Ng5 d5 13 f3! Rad8 (13 ... h6!?) 14 g4! dxe4 15 fxe4 h6?! 16 Qf3! Be8 17 Bc2 Nd7 18 Nh3 Nc5 19 Nf2 b5 20 g5 h5 21 Nf5! gxf5?! (21 ... Ne6) 22 exf5 f6 23 g6 Nxg6 24 fxg6 Bxg6 25 Rg1 e4? (25 ... Bxd3! Chigorin) 26 dxe4 Kh7 27 Rxg6! Kxg6 28 Qf5+ Kf7 29 Qxh5+ Kg8 30 Qxc5 White soon won. Also a splendid victory!

6 Nbd2 Bg7 7 Nf1 0-0



8 Ba4

Preserving the bishop (unlike Anderssen – *Game No.13*). The second game went 8 Ne3 d5!, and White had to make the unwieldy move 9 Qc2. And after 8 Qe2 Steinitz suggested 8 ... Bd7 9 Ba4?! Nd4! 10 cxd4 Bxa4 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 Nxe5 Bb5 with an excellent game.

8 ... Nd7?!

An important moment in the opening: Black is at the crossroads. ‘By playing my knight via c5 to e6, I was intending to prevent d3-d4 in the immediate future, and also the (unrealisable) plan with ... f7-f5.’ (Chigorin) Fully in the spirit of the new school! Although simpler was 8 ... d5!? 9 Qe2 (unfavourable is 9 Bxc6?! bxc6 10 Nxe5 Qe8 11 f4 dxe4 etc.) 9 ... Qd6 10 Bc2 b6 (10 ... Be6!?) 11 Ng3 Ba6 12 0-0 dxe4 13 Nxe4 Nxe4 14 Qxe4 Bb7 with equal chances, as occurred in the 14th game.

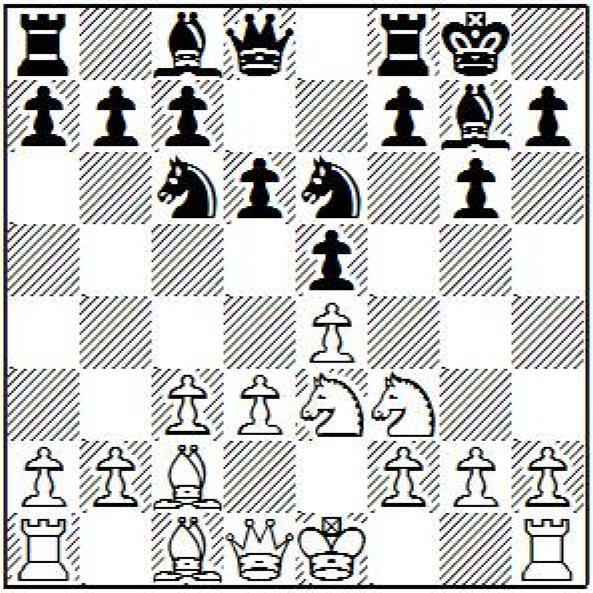
8 ... a6 was also suggested, for example: 9 Ne3 b5 10 Bb3 Na5 11 Bc2 d5 (Euwe) or 9 Ng3 b5 10 Bb3 d5 11 Qe2 Re8 12 0-0 Bb7 (Keres), both with equal chances. In short, White has nothing in particular, and he is even somewhat behind in development. On the other hand, there are nuances in the position that cause Chigorin a certain discomfort: he is unable to initiate a concrete tactical battle. And Steinitz subtly exploits this factor!

9 Ne3 Nc5

‘9 ... f5 was recommended, and if 10 b4, then 10 ... f4 11 Nd5 g5 with a complicated game. However, after 10 exf5 gxf5 11 Nd5 the chances are with White.’ (Neishtadt)

10 Bc2 Ne6

But not immediately 10 ... f5 on account of 11 exf5 gxf5 12 d4! But now it would seem difficult for White to do anything active, whereas Black is intending ... f7-f5, or perhaps ... Ne7 and ... d6-d5.



11 h4!

‘In general this is not especially dangerous early in the game, but in the given instance I noticed a weak point on the enemy kingside and I am not to be trifled with: despite my age, I can still bite.’ (Steinitz)

I think that this move must have shocked Chigorin: how is it that White is suddenly beginning an attack?! Steinitz must be punished, but how? And Mikhail Ivanovich decided to reply (following the classical rules!) with a counter-blow in the centre, although in the given instance this proves to be an empty blow, since White’s centre is securely fortified.

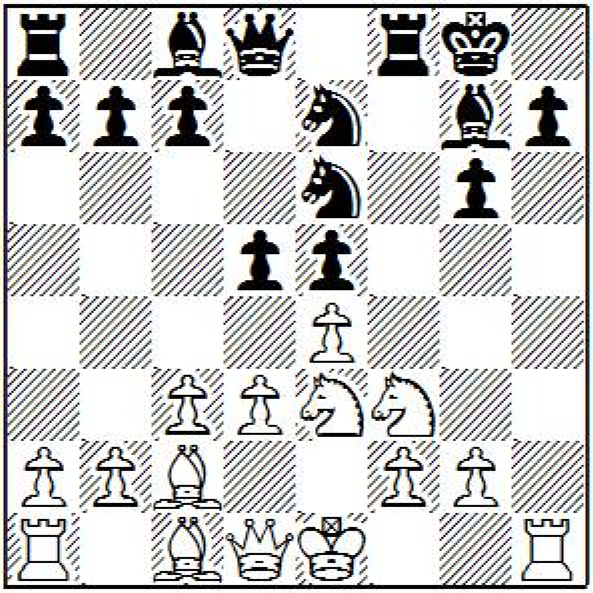
11 ... Ne7

11 ... h6?! 12 h5 g5 (Mason) is dubious in view of 13 Nf5 and d3-d4! with advantage to White. ‘I can only regret that I myself did not bite, by playing 11 ... f5. The consequences of this counterattack are very hard to foresee. Here are the immediate ones: 12 h5 f4 13 Nd5 g5 14 h6 Bf6 15 Bb3 Kh8 or 12 exf5 gxf5 13 Nd5 Ne7 14 Nxe7+ Qxe7 15 Ng5 h6 (15 ... Qe8!?).’ (Chigorin)

‘In fact 11 ... f5 was risky, to say the least: after 12 exf5 gxf5 White should play 13 d4! with excellent attacking chances.’ (Neishtadt) Analysis demonstrates the correctness of this evaluation.

12 h5 d5 (but not 12 ... g5?! 13 h6!) **13 hxg6 fxg6?**

A serious, and probably even decisive mistake: the ‘Spanish’ bishop at c2, which has hitherto been dozing, suddenly comes alive. Correct, of course, was 13 ... hxg6 (towards the centre!), as initially Chigorin wanted to play. In this case, as he put it, ‘Black would have succeeded in putting his king in a safe place’: 14 exd5 Nxd5 15 Nxd5 Qxd5 16 Bh6 Bxh6 17 Rxh6 Kg7 18 Qd2 Nf4.’ It is true that 14 Qe2! is stronger, then Bd2 and 0-0-0 with the initiative, but this is a very sharp position and still a long way from a ‘clear plus for White’ evaluation (the play could have developed along the lines of the game with Lasker, mentioned in the notes to Black’s fifth move).



14 exd5! Nxd5 15 Nxd5 Qxd5 16 Bb3 Qc6 17 Qe2

Preventing ... e5-e4. Gradually coming into play are long-term positional factors, of which Chigorin was not even aware. It turns out that the chronic defects in Black’s position (in particular the weakness of his king) can no longer be eliminated.

17 ... Bd7

Chigorin later lamented that he had not played 17 ... a5, giving the line 18 a4! (18 Bh6 Bxh6 19 Rxh6 a4 etc.) 18 ... Qb6 19 Bxe6+(?) Bxe6 20 Ng5 Bf5 21 Nxh7 Rfd8. However, Neishtadt recommends 19 Qc2 and Be3, and I – 19 Bc4! with an obvious advantage.

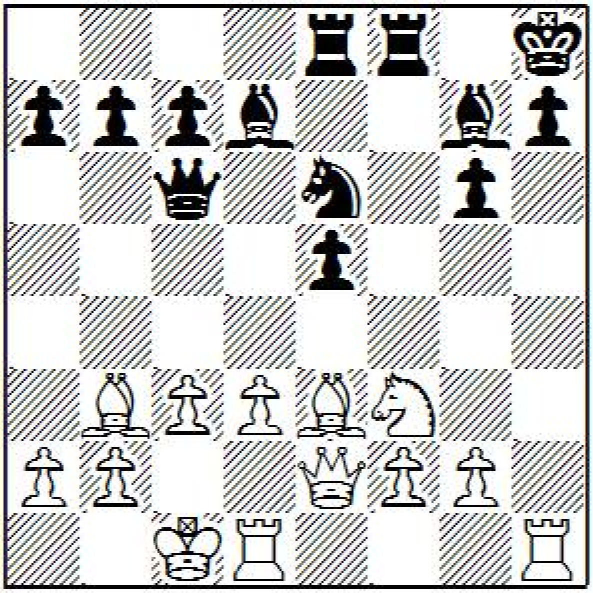
18 Be3

There was no point at all in playing 18 Nxe5? Qxg2 19 Nxd7 Qxh1+ 20 Kd2 Kh8 21 Bxe6 Qh2 22 Nxf8 Rxf8 with equal chances.

18 ... Kh8

Steinitz suggested 18 ... Rf7 19 0-0-0 Bh8, but after 20 d4! Black’s position is unenviable.

19 0-0-0 (I think that this late queenside castling must have also shocked Chigorin: not bad for a Ruy Lopez!) **19 ... Rae8**



20 Qf1! (preparing the thematic d3-d4, after which the attack on the king will become irresistible) **20 ... a5**

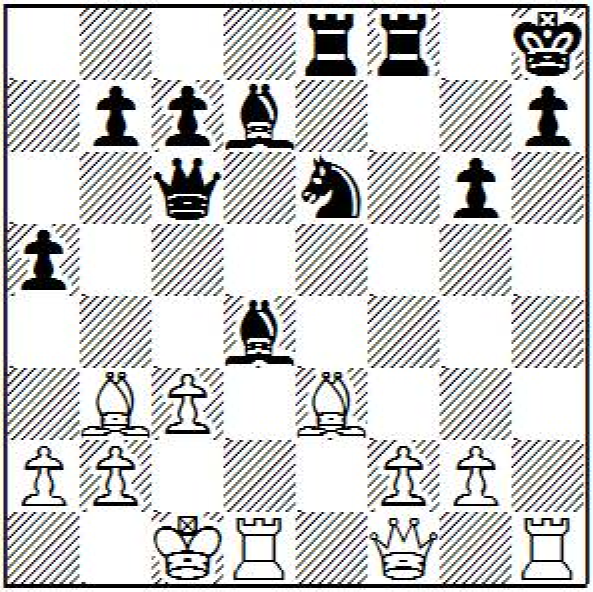
‘An empty stroke, testifying to Black’s confusion. 20 ... Rf5 and ... Nf8 was better.’ (Euwe) But, in my opinion, after 21 Kb1 White has a significant advantage.

Both Steinitz and Chigorin thought that 20 ... Nf4 was the most logical, although then White has a pleasant choice between 21 Ng5 h6 22 Nf7+ Kh7 23 d4! Qxg2 24 Qxg2 Nxg2 25 Nxh6! (Ravinsky) and the immediate 21 d4! Bg4 (21 ... exd4 22 Rxd4!) 22 Ng5 h6 23 f3 (Neishtadt).

21 d4! exd4

Forced, in view of the threat of d4-d5.

22 Nxd4 Bxd4



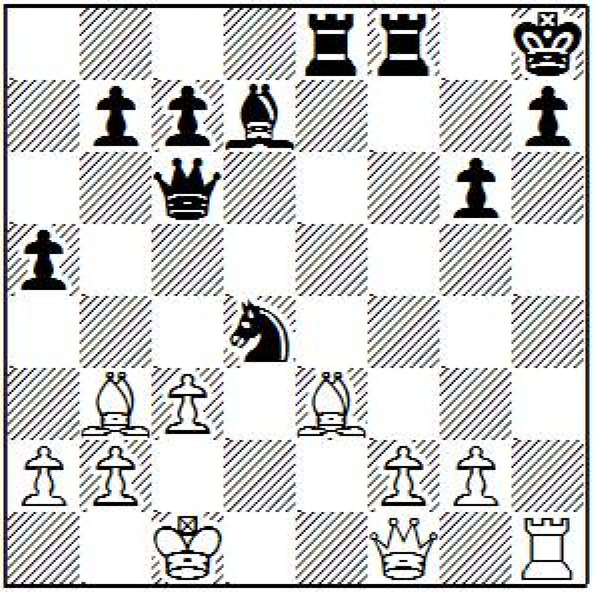
The exchange of this bishop looks suicidal. 22 ... Nxd4? was even worse: 23 Rxh7+! Kxh7 24 Qh1+, and 22 ... Qa6 23 Bc4 Qa8 24 Nf3 was also unattractive. As the lesser evil Neishtadt recommended 22 ... Qe4 23 Bc2 Qg4 24 f3 Qg3 25 Nf5! (25 Ne2 Qe5) 25 ... gxf5 26 Rxd7, but 24 ... Nxd4! 25 Rxd4 Qe6 is better, and therefore, in my view, 23 Nf3! Qc6 24 Qd3 with a winning attack is correct.

23 Rxd4!

The culmination of White’s deep strategy.

23 ... Nxd4?

Disastrous. ‘23 ... Re7 would have prevented the rook sacrifice, but I did not see any escape after 24 Rdh4. If 24 ... Rff7, then 25 g3 with the threat of 26 Bd4+ Kg8 27 Qd3 and 28 Qg6, against which there is no defence.’ (Chigorin) 25 ... Kg8 26 Qd3 Qb5 is perhaps more tenacious, although objectively Black’s position is hopeless.



24 Rxh7+!

A highly dramatic finish! If the regular 3 Bb5 and the march h4-h5xg6 are disregarded, this is the first crossing of the demarcation line. White crosses the line – and immediately it is mate!

24 ... Kxh7 25 Qh1+ Kg7 26 Bh6+ Kf6 27 Qh4+ Ke5 28 Qxd4+ 1-0

Black resigned one move before checkmate.

A very deep game, demonstrating that Steinitz's superiority over his contemporaries was in his global understanding of chess. Here he outplayed his opponent simply and imperceptibly, without moving beyond the third rank. Moreover, this was no ordinary opponent, but one of the most outstanding players of that era, a real contender for the supreme title. But he was unable to do anything! Steinitz as though looked into the future: his stealthy plan with d2-d3, c2-c3, Nd2-f1-e3 and Bc2 became the prototype of modern manoeuvring play ...

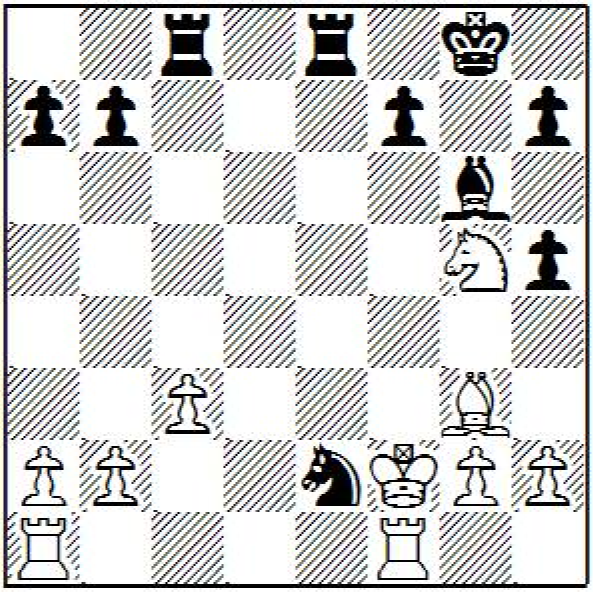
This wounding defeat somewhat disheartened Chigorin: after a drawing respite he also lost the sixth game. But then he drew inspiration and resoundingly announced his claim to the throne, by gaining a whole series of wins and seizing the lead for a long time: 5-3 (=4), 7-6 ... In the 18th game Steinitz managed to level the scores, but after that Chigorin again went ahead: 8-7. Here, by his own admission, he was unable to withstand the oppressive tropical heat and he clearly weakened (his older opponent proved more resilient – perhaps because he had been to Cuba more often): he lost the 20th and 22nd games. And yet he still cherished hopes of winning the match ...

The opening of the 23rd game – a King’s Gambit – was played amazingly badly by the challenger and he quickly reached a difficult ending. Then, however, some genuine miracles began.

Game 26

M.Chigorin-W.Steinitz

World Championship Match, Havana 1892, 23rd game



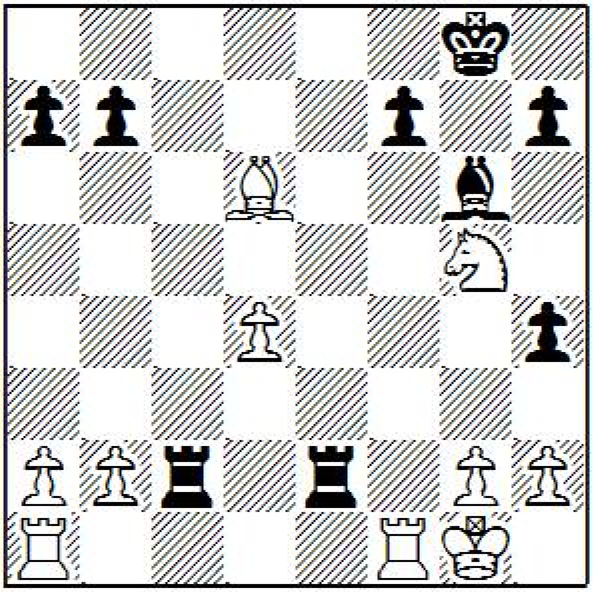
22 ... h4?

The unpretentious 22 ... Nxg3 keeps an edge: 23 Kxg3 (if 23 hxg3 Re5 24 Nf3 there is the manoeuvre 24 ... Rb5! and the pawn cannot be held – after 25 b3 Rxc3 White has a difficult position) 23 ... Re2 24 Rf2 h4+ 25 Kf3 Bh5+ 26 g4 Bxg4+ 27 Kg2 Rce8 etc.

23 Bd6 Nd4?

A very strange decision! Black suddenly gives up a piece, instead of playing 23 ... Rcd8 (23 ... Rc6!?) 24 Rfd1 (24 Rad1 Nc1!) 24 ... Bh5, e.g. 25 Nf3 (25 Rd2 Nf4!) 25 ... h3 26 gxh3 (26 g3 Ng1!) 26 ... f5 27 Rd2 f4 with counterplay.

24 cxd4 Rc2+ 25 Kg1 Ree2



26 Rae1!

This is what Steinitz overlooked!

26 ... Rxg2+ 27 Kh1 Kg7 28 Re8!

‘28 Re7 Rgf2 29 Rxf2 Rxf2 30 Rxb7 h6 31 Kg1 would have won more surely for White,’ writes Chigorin, overlooking the simple 28 ... Rxg5! Also inaccurate is 28 Be5+?! Kf8 29 d5 Rxg5 30 d6 Bf5 31 Bf6 ‘winning’ (Steinitz), in view of 31 ... Rgg2 32 Rxf5 Rxh2+ 33 Kg1 Rcg2+ 34 Kf1 h3 or even 31 ... Bd7! 32 Bxg5 Bc6+ 33 Rf3 Bxf3+ 34 Kg1 Bc6 35 Bh6+ Kg8 36 Re5 Rg2+ 37 Kf1 Rg6 with a guaranteed draw.

28 ... f5

If 28 ... Rxg5?? 29 Bf8+ Kg8 30 Bh6 mate.

29 Ne6+?!

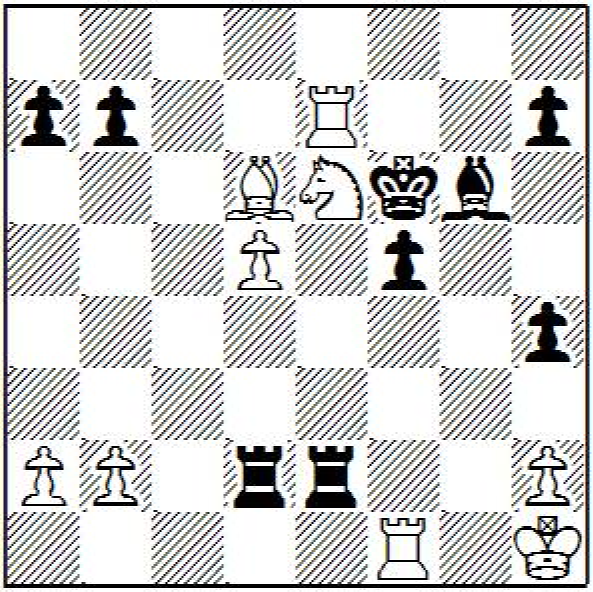
Time-trouble! 29 Re7+ would have won more easily, for example: 29 ... Kh6 (29 ... Kf6?? 30 Ne4 mate) 30 Bf4!? (the computer makes this move instead of more normal 30 Ne6 Rxb2 31 Bf4+ Kh5 32 h3 with the threat of Ng7 mate) 30 ... Kh5 31 Nxh7 Bxh7 32 Rxh7+ Kg6 33 Rxb7 Rxb2 34 Rxa7

Rxa2 35 Rxa2 Rxa2 36 d5 and wins, or 29 ... Kg8 30 Ne6 f4 31 Nxf4 Rxh2+ 32 Kg1 h3 (32 ... Rxb2 33 Be5! Bf7 34 Rd7 also wins for White) 33 Rfe1! (but not 33 Be5? Rh1+! 34 Kxh1 Be4+) 33 ... Rxb2 34 Rd7 Bf7 35 Be5! Bxa2 36 Bf6, weaving a mating net.

29 ... Kf6 30 Re7 Rge2!

More tenacious than 30 ... Rxb2 31 Nc5 Rxh2+ 32 Bxh2 Kxe7 33 d5.

31 d5 Rcd2



And here Chigorin did not bother to seal his move, although the arbiter had already prepared the envelope (the time control, I should remind you, was 30 moves in two hours, after which the game was adjourned).

32 Bb4?? (truly the ‘blunder of the century!) **32 ... Rxh2+ 0-1**

In view of 33 Kg1 Rdg2 mate White resigned. And yet after the cool 32 Rxb7 he would have retained every chance of winning! ‘If 32 ... Rxe6 (32 ... Rxd5? 33 Nf4) there would have followed 33 dxe6 Rxd6 34 e7 Be8 35 Rc1.’ (Chigorin) Neishtadt adds the variations 32 ... f4 33 Rxf4+ Bf5 34 Rf1 Rxd5 35 Ng7! Rxd6 36 Nxf5 and 32 ... h3 33 Bf4 Rf2 34 Bg5+! Ke5 35 Re1+ Rde2 36 Rxe2+ Rxe2 37 Kg1; true, here 37 ... Rg2+ 38 Kf1 Kxd5 39 Nf4+ Kc6 40 Rxa7 Rxg5 prolongs the struggle, and therefore more accurate is 34 Rb1! Rxd5 35 Re1 (threatening Bg5 mate) 35 ... Rg2 36 Bg3! winning.

Steinitz considered 32 ... Bh5!? (with the threat of ... Bf3+) 33 Rb3 Bf7, when there is a choice between 34 Bb8 and 34 Nf4! Rxh2+ 35 Kg1 with a won game. In my view, White also wins by 33 Rg7!? Rxe6 (33 ... Rxd5? 34 Nf4) 34 dxe6 Kxg7 35 Be5+ Kg8 36 Rxf5 h3 37 Kg1 Rg2+ 38 Kf1 Bg6 39 e7 Bf7 40 b4 Rg6 41 Bd4.

Thus the score became +10 -8 =5 in favour of Steinitz, and he retained the title of world champion. ‘It is unlikely that we will ever forget that decisive moment,’ wrote the Cuban press. ‘At the 23rd game more than a thousand people were present, and all were discussing Chigorin’s brilliant play. At any minute Steinitz’s resignation was expected. Suddenly there was an extraordinary commotion: the spectators stood up, and they all saw how the Russian master, nervy, with a changed face, was holding his head in his hands: he had moved away the bishop that was defending him against mate. “What a pity!” repeated hundreds of voices. What a vexatious and terrible ending to a wonderful match for the world championship! Chigorin can feel proud: never was Steinitz so close to defeat as now.’

And it was indeed a staggeringly dramatic match, a fierce clash between the Artist and the Scientist. Chigorin probably played more prettily, but Steinitz played more correctly. The world champion himself called his win ‘a Pyrrhic victory’ and admitted: ‘It remains a fact that I am unable to contend with the Russian master as successfully as I have contended with the other great masters, including Zukertort.’

However, it was right that Steinitz won. If he was to some extent a positional dogmatist, a player of strict rules, then Chigorin was rather a tactical dogmatist, an adventure lover (in this sense his follower became Alekhine, but already in another cycle of the development of the game). Steinitz’s theory was after all more soundly based, since it encompassed more types of positions, and Steinitz defeated Chigorin, in particular, thanks to his greater range of vision. In ‘his’ positions – with the initiative, with an attack – Mikhail Ivanovich was invincible, but in ‘foreign’ positions, where the correct paths had to be patiently groped for, he made mistakes and was inferior. And overall he all the time lacked a little something ...

Passions around Mount Olympus

After another Steinitz coronation, the chess world asked the eternal question: who would be the champion’s next opponent? Or more precisely, given his advancing years, who would be the next chess king?

The most realistic challenger looked to be the 30-year-old German champion Doctor Siegbert Tarrasch, who had won the important tournaments in Breslau (1889), Manchester (1890) and Dresden (1892) in brilliant fashion. He could have played Steinitz even after Manchester, but he declined the tempting offer of the Havana Chess Club, stating that he was occupied with his medical practice.

Also clearly on the up was the 24-year-old Emanuel Lasker. But for the present he had not achieved sufficient successes, and therefore Tarrasch quite reasonably declined his challenge to a candidates match. Although the Doctor would then have probably been able to defeat both the inexperienced Lasker, and the wounded Steinitz, he chose another course – he challenged the recent ‘number one’ candidate Chigorin to a match!

This match (St Petersburg, autumn 1893) is deserving of a special mention, since it became a truly champion-like battle – not only by its format (the first to win 10 games; if 9-9, then a draw), but also by the richness of its chess content. The contestants fought literally to the last pawn: in the first nine games and the six final ones there was not a single draw!

Victory would have given Tarrasch every right to a match with Steinitz, and the Doctor from Nuremberg briskly got down to business: 1-0, 4-2 ... However, Chigorin had no intention of yielding, especially on his home ground: by winning the seventh and eighth games in excellent style, he levelled the scores.

Game 27

M.Chigorin-S.Tarrasch

Match, St Petersburg 1893, 8th game

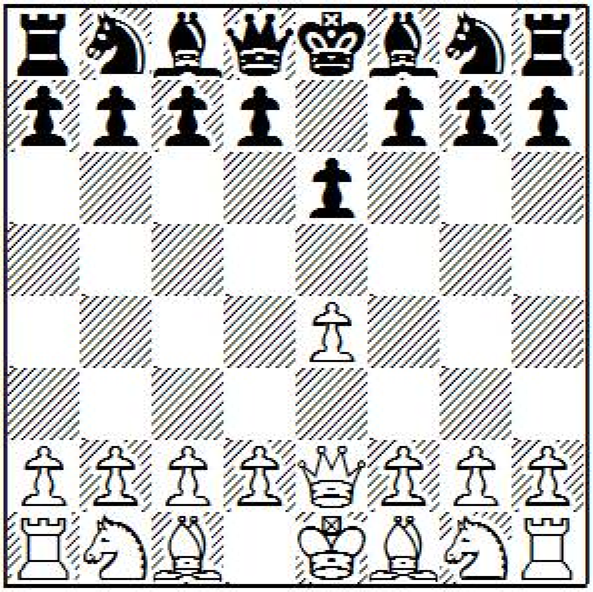
French Defence C00

1 e4 e6 2 Qe2!?

Chigorin’s patent move (in Tarrasch’s opinion, ‘ugly’), which was tested in the match with an overall score of +5 -3 =2. Chigorin described how this idea was evoked by Steinitz’s play in one of their games – 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d3 d6 5 c3 g6 6 Nbd2 Bg7 7 Nf1 0-0 8 Ba4 d5 9

Qe2! (Havana 14th matchgame 1892): ‘In this way Steinitz avoided the need to take e4xd5. It was this that gave rise to my initial plan with g2-g3, Bg2 and d2-d3, which was later varied.’

Usually Tarrasch gained good positions from the opening and, incidentally, scored textbook wins in the fourth and 14th games, where ‘White’s attack on the kingside was halted with the help of counterplay on the queenside.’ But on the whole, this variation, which is very close to King’s Indian set-ups (which at that time were still unusual), conformed with Chigorin’s original style: in the resulting complicated and obscure play he was able to confuse his formidable, logically thinking opponent, the outstanding pupil of the Steinitz School.



2 ... c5

Later Tarrasch switched to 2 ... Be7 (*Game No.30*). Also possible is 2 ... Nc6 (2 ... e5 3 f4!) 3 Nf3 e5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d3 Be7 6 g3 d5 with equality, but take a look at this ‘King’s Indian Attack’ as performed by Mikhail Ivanovich: 7 Bg2 dxe4?! 8 dxe4 Bd6?! 9 Nbd2 0-0 10 Nc4 Be6 11 0-0 Ne8 12 b4! a6 13 Rd1 Qe7 14 a4! f6 15 Ba3 b5? (this is already a direct mistake: Black faced problems that were too difficult for those times!) 16 axb5 axb5 17 Ne3 Rb8 18 Bc1 Nd8 19 Ra7 Nc6 20 Ra6 Nd8 21 Nd5 Qd7 22 Ne1 c6 23 Ne3 Qb7 24 Ra1 Bc7 25 Nf5! Bb6 26 Be3! (weakness of the c5-square!)

26 ... Bxe3 27 Qxe3 Rf7 28 Nd3 Bc8? 29 Nxe5 fxe5 30 Rxd8 Be6 31 Nd6 1-0 (Chigorin-Teichmann, Hastings 1895).

Deep positional play, more typical of the mid-20th century! Chigorin demonstrated all the basic ideas of the set-up with the X-ray bishop at g2 and symmetrical pawns on e4 and e5: restriction of the knight at c6 by c2-c3, manoeuvre of the knight to c4, advance of the a- and b-pawns, exploitation of the d5- and f5-squares, the gradual suffocation of the opponent ... This was the style of the future! Many decades later the King's Indian Attack became fashionable – incidentally, it was successfully employed by Fischer: against Ivkov (Santa Monica 1966), Durao (Havana Olympiad 1966), Miagmarsuren (Sousse interzonal 1967), Panno (Buenos Aires 1970) and so on.

I should add that after 2 ... Nc6 there is also 3 f4!? (3 Nc3 e5 is equal, Chigorin-Lasker, London 1899) 3 ... Nd4 (3 ... Nge7 4 Nf3 d5 5 e5 ... 1-0 Chigorin-Gunsberg, Monte Carlo 1902) 4 Qd3 c5 5 Nf3 Nc6 (5 ... Nxf3+ is better) 6 Qe2! Be7 7 Nc3 d5 8 d3 Nf6 9 g3 – in this way Mikhail Ivanovich crushed the young Rubinstein (Third Russian Championship, Kiev 1903).

3 g3

The second game went 3 Nc3?! Nc6 4 Nf3 a6 5 g3 Nd4 6 Qd3 Qb6 7 Bg2 Ne7 8 Nxd4 cxd4 9 Ne2 Nc6 10 c3 dxc3! and 11 ... Bc5 with an excellent game for Black, but ... he got mated! Or 3 f4 Nc6 4 d3 Be7 (4 ... Nge7!?) 5 Nf3 d5 6 Nc3 Nf6 with equality (Chigorin-Tarrasch, Ostend 1905).

3 ... Nc6 4 Bg2 (in the fourth game Chigorin began with 4 Nf3) **4 ... Be7**

In the sixth game Black equalised by 4 ... Nd4 5 Qd3 (5 Qd1 d5) 5 ... Be7 6 Nc3 Bf6 7 Nb5 Nxb5 8 Qxb5 Qb6! 9 Qe2 d6 10 Nf3 Bd7, but on this occasion Tarrasch 'did not want to repeat the same moves, but to take a new course as soon as possible.'

According to Botvinnik, also good is 4 ... Nge7 5 Nc3 g6 6 d3 Bg7, and 'the subsequently unavoidable ... d7-d5 enables Black to carry out a plan, which in the English Opening is usually chosen by White,' and, moreover, 'the move Qe2 may prove inappropriate.'

5 Nc3?!

Blocking the c-pawn – at that time the correct ways were only just beginning to be probed. Today everyone knows that more energetic is 5 Nf3 d5 6 d3 Nf6 7 0-0 0-0 (7 ... b6?! 8 e5 Nd7 9 c4!) 8 Re1 or 8 e5 Ne8 (8 ... Nd7 9 c4!) 9 c4 Nc7 10 Bf4 (Tal-Debarnot, Las Palmas 1977).

But after 8 Nc3 a *tabiya* of the Chigorin Variation again arises, for example: 8 ... d4 (in the fourth game Tarrasch played 8 ... a6, while Schiffers tried both 8 ... Nd4 9 Qd1 dxe4 10 dxe4 Qb6, and 8 ... dxe4 9 dxe4 e5) 9 Nd1 e5 10 Ne1! Qb6 11 Kh1 Bg4 12 f3 Bd7 13 f4! Rac8 14 b3 (Chigorin-Schiffers, St Petersburg match 1895). A double-edged position in the spirit of the modern King's Indian was reached (an analogy suggests itself with the well-known game Taimanov-Fischer, Vancouver 3rd matchgame 1971).

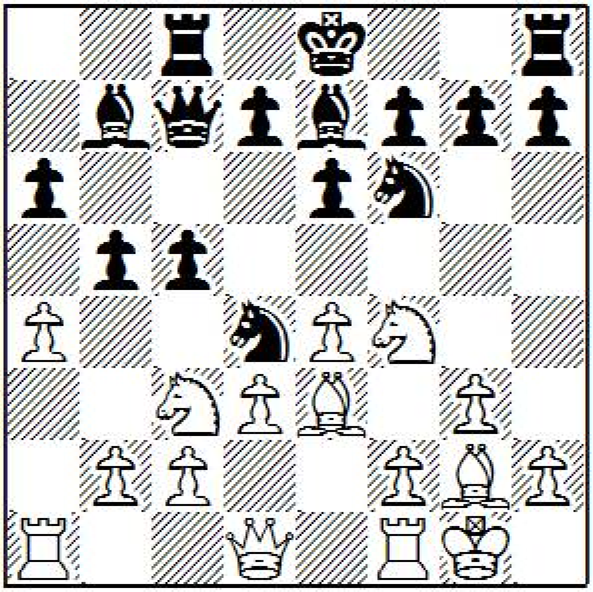
5 ... Qc7

'The immediate 5 ... Nf6? is impossible in view of 6 e5, but 5 ... Nd4 is stronger.' (Tarrasch) Then 6 Qd1 Nf6 7 d3 and Nce2 was possible, with an unclear game.

6 Nh3!? a6 7 Nf4 (preventing ... d7-d5 for a long time) **7 ... Nd4 8 Qd1**

If 8 Qd3?! Black was intending 8 ... Bf6 with the threat of ... c5-c4.

8 ... Nf6 9 d3 b5 10 0-0 Bb7 11 Be3 (but not 11 e5?! on account of 11 ... Bxg2 12 exf6 Bf3! 13 fxg7 Rg8) **11 ... Rc8 12 a4**



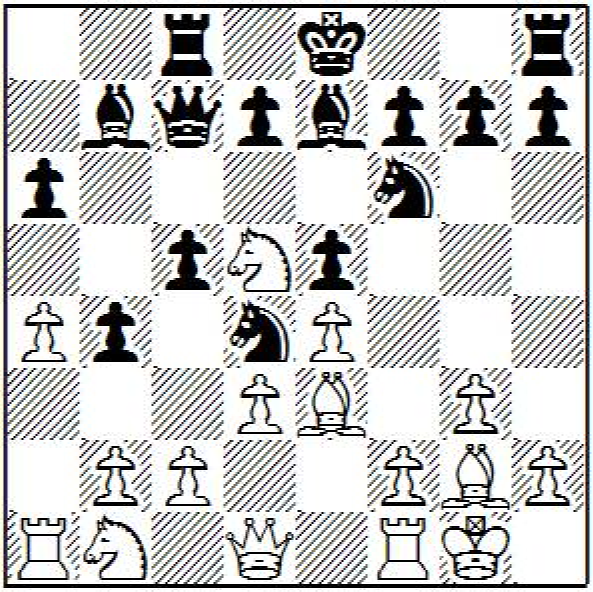
12 ... b4

‘The first mistake, but one with serious consequences – the surrender of the c4-square. Correct was 12 ... Qb6 with a reasonable game.’ (Tarrasch) However, in this case Chigorin could have developed his initiative by 13 axb5 axb5 14 e5 Bxg2 15 Nxg2 Ng8 (15 ... Nd5?! 16 Nxd5 exd5 17 Bxd4 cxd4 18 Nf4) 16 b4! (16 Ne4 d5 17 exd6 Bxd6 18 c3 Nf5 19 b4 Nxe3 20 fxe3 is unclear) 16 ... cxb4 17 Qg4 etc.

13 Nb1! e5?!

‘The second and decisive mistake. I thought that the knight could not go to d5, since after the exchange on d5 the white pawn would be weak. This error cost me the game ... After 13 ... 0-0 14 Nd2 Rfd8 15 c3 bxc3 16 bxc3 Nc6 17 d4 cxd4 18 cxd4 d5 or 14 c3 bxc3 15 bxc3 Nc6 16 d4 cxd4 17 cxd4 Nb4 Black would have had a quite acceptable game.’ (Tarrasch)

14 Nd5!



14 ... Bxd5?

‘If 14 ... Nxd5 White would have gained the advantage by playing 15 exd5 Qd6 16 c3 bxc3 17 bxc3 Nf5 18 c4, when the bishop at b7 is condemned to a lengthy period of inaction. Even so, this would have been preferable.’ (Tarrasch) Of course! Especially since moving the rook from c8 and playing ... d7-d6 and ... Bc8 would not take so very long. But in addition, after 15 ... Qd6 (the modern 15 ... b3!? 16 cxb3 0-0 17 Nd2 is not altogether sufficient) 16 c3 more accurate is 16 ... Nf5! (not hurrying with

16 ... bxc3?!), for example: 17 c4 Nxe3 18 fxe3 Qh6 19 Qf3 0-0 20 Nd2 f5 with sharp play.

15 exd5 Qd6?

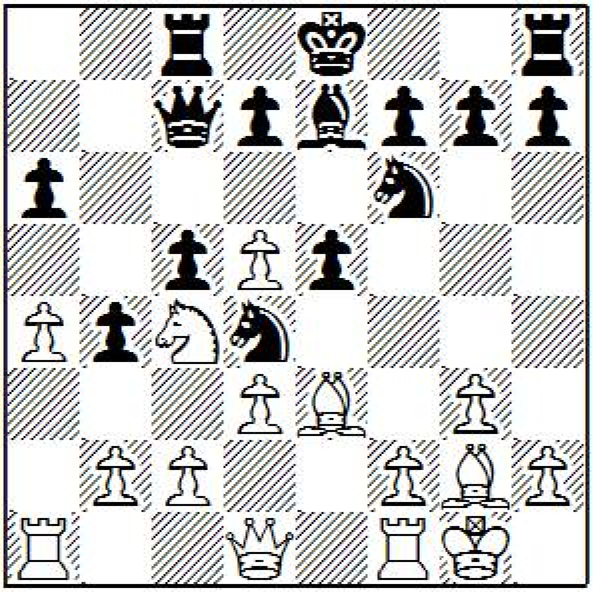
After the strategic mistake comes a tactical one: Tarrasch missed ‘a subtle combination by the opponent’, overlooking that it will be impossible to take on d5.

16 Nd2! Qc7

It transpires that after 16 ... Nxd5? 17 Nc4 Qe6 18 Bxd4 cxd4 19 Bxd5 Qxd5 20 Nb6 Black loses the exchange.

17 Nc4

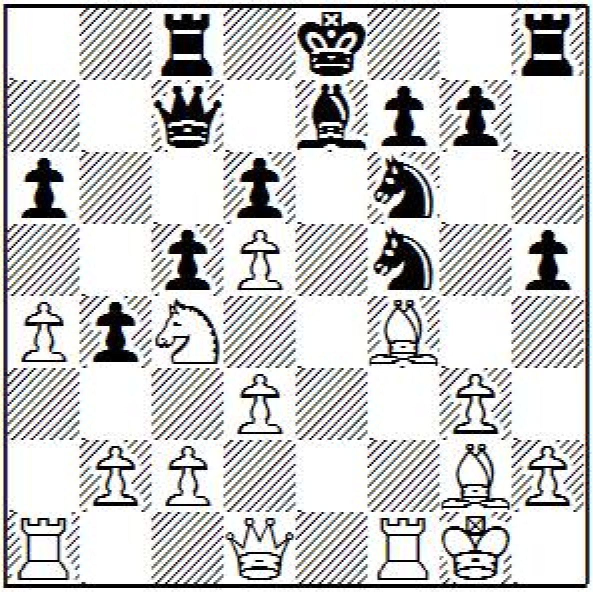
And now he has a strategically lost position.



17 ... h5

‘Inwardly I was reconciled to defeat.’ (Tarrasch). Indeed, the knight at d4 is in danger, and after 17 ... Nf5 (17 ... d6? 18 Bh3 Rd8 19 c3 traps the knight) 18 Bd2 g6 19 g4! Ng7 (not 19 ... Nh4? 20 d6 Bxd6 21 Bg5) 20 f4 Black’s position is unenviable.

18 f4 Nf5 19 Bd2 exf4 20 Bxf4 d6



21 Qe2?!

Stronger was Tarrasch’s suggestion of 21 Bh3! g6 22 Bxf5 (I would add 22 ... gxf5 23 Bg5 Nxd5 24 Rxf5) or 21 ... Ng4 22 Bxg4 hxg4 23 Qxg4 with a won game in each instance.

21 ... Rd8

‘Better was 21 ... Nd4 22 Qd2 Rd8.’ (Tarrasch). But after 23 Rae1 0-0 24 c3! Black is also lost, as is also the case after 22 ... h4 23 Rae1 Kd8 24 c3.

22 Rae1 Kf8

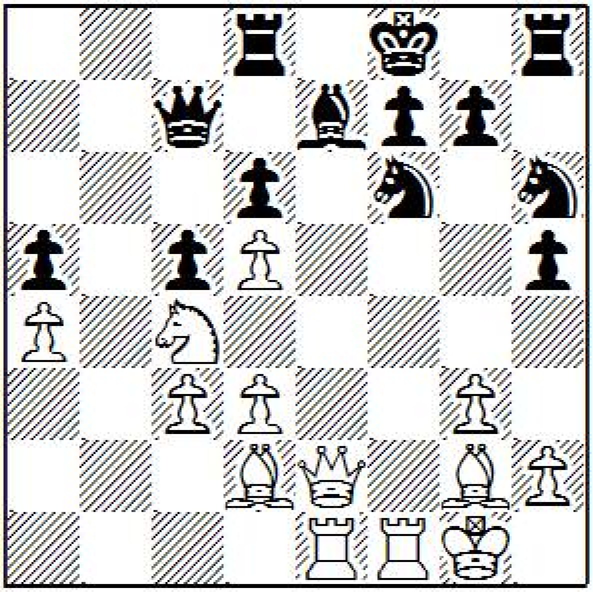
Black can hardly contemplate 22 ... 0-0 23 Bh3 Ng4 24 Bxg4 hxg4 25 Qxg4.

23 c3 a5?!

‘Had I not lost heart a few moves earlier, I would now have played 23 ... bxc3 24 bxc3 Re8.’ (Tarrasch) Although here too it is all sufficiently clear: 25 Qf3 g6 26 Rb1 Kg7 27 Rb6.

24 Bd2 bxc3 25 bxc3 Nh6

Or 25 ... g6 26 Bh3!



26 Nxa5! Nhg8

'To what base uses we may return, Horatio!' writes Tarrasch, wittily quoting Hamlet's words from the scene in the graveyard.

27 Nc6 Re8 28 c4 Qd7 29 Bf4 h4 30 g4 Nxg4

Despair: 30 ... Qxg4 31 Qxg4 Nxg4 32 Nxe7 Rxe7 33 Bxd6 is hopeless.

31 Bh3 N8f6 32 Bg5 Rh5 33 Bxf6 gxf6 34 Qxg4! 1-0

34 ... Rg5 35 Qxg5!

A good illustration of Chigorin's original, non-routine style. It was of particular value that his opponent was one of the strongest players in the world, an excellent tactician who had absorbed Steinitz's ideas and sensed the nuances of positional play. However, even he was unable to counter Chigorin's originality! This once again confirms the scale of the talent that Tarrasch ran into in this match ...

However, the very next day the Doctor was able to win one back, and he again took the lead.

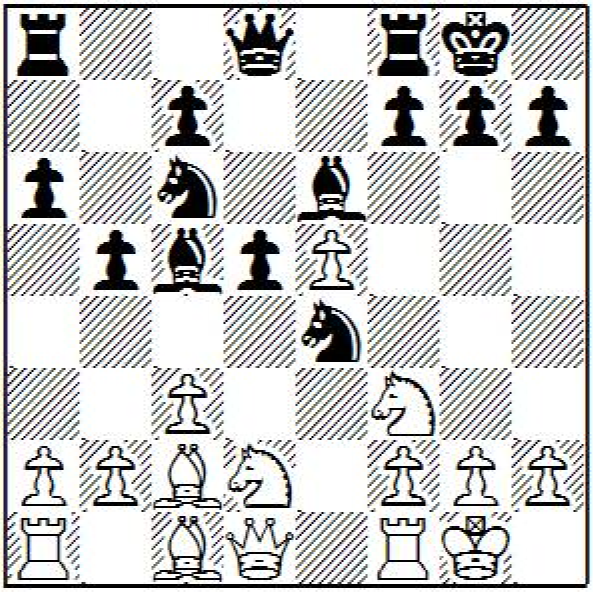
Game 28

S.Tarrasch-M.Chigorin

Match, St Petersburg 1893, 9th game

Ruy Lopez C82

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 d5 8 dxe5 Be6 9 c3 Bc5 (9 ... Be7 – *Game No.65*) **10 Nbd2 0-0 11 Bc2**



One of the *tabiyas* of the Open Variation of the Ruy Lopez.

11 ... Nxd2?!

An old continuation, unpopular nowadays on account of its passivity. In the 20th century they played both 11 ... Nxf2 (Smyslov-Botvinnik, Moscow Championship 1943/44) and 11 ... f5 (Smyslov-Reshevsky, USSR-USA radio match 1945), and since the time of the Fischer-Larsen game (Santa Monica 1966) 11 ... Bf5! has been in fashion – here one immediately recalls the match duels Karpov-Korchnoi (1978, 1981) and Karpov's win over Yusupov (50th USSR Championship, Moscow 1983). We will examine these important games in the second and third volumes in this series.

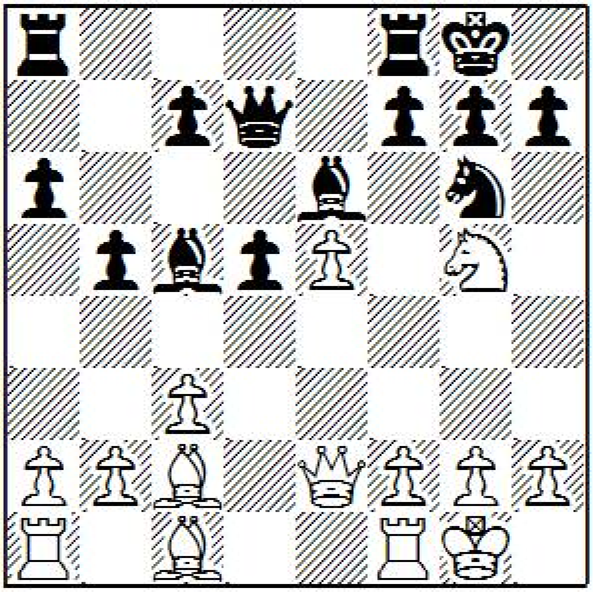
12 Qxd2! (with the threat of Qd3) **12 ... Ne7**

The main move is 12 ... f6 (*Game No.66*), but in games by Tarrasch, Schlechter, Maróczy and Bernstein 12 ... Re8 also occurred, when Janowski played and Keres later recommended 13 Qf4!?

13 Ng5?!

'A tempting but premature attempt to attack. 13 Nd4 is more solid.' (Tarrasch) Also interesting is 13 Qg5!? Ng6 14 Qh5 Be7 15 Nd4 (Mason), while the main line is 13 b4 Bb6 14 Ng5 Bf5 15 Bxf5 Nxf5 16 Qd3 g6 17 Qh3! with the initiative (if 17 e6!? f6 18 Nf7 Qe7 19 Qxd5 Rfe8 20 Re1 Ng7 21 Nh6+ Black must reply 21 ... Kf8, but not 21 ... Kh8? 22 Bb2! Nxe6 23 c4! Rad8 24 Rxe6! Smyslov-Ragozin, 13th USSR Championship, Moscow 1944).

13 ... Ng6 14 Qe2 (now 15 Qh5 h6 16 Nxe6 is threatened) **14 ... Qd7!**



15 Be3

'After 15 Qh5?! h6 16 Nxe6 (or 16 Nxf7 Bxf7! 17 Bxg6 Bxg6 18 Qxg6 Rxf2!) 16 ... Qxe6 White would have ended up in an inferior position due to difficulties with the defence of his e5-pawn and the pressure on f2, for example: 17 Bf5 Qe7! 18 Bxg6 fxg6 19 Qxg6 Rxf2! or 18 e6 Nh4 19 exf7+ Rxf7 20 Bd3 Rxf2! with a winning attack.' (Tarrasch)

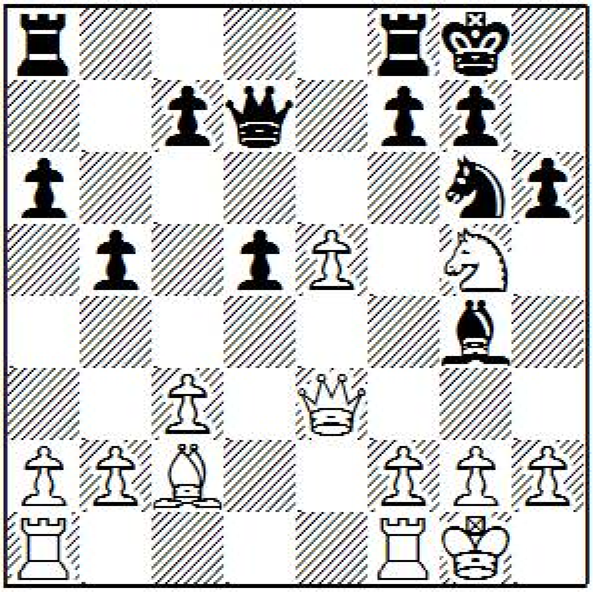
15 ... Bg4! 16 Qd3

White must already play cautiously: after 16 f3?! (16 Nf3? Bxf3!) 16 ... Bxe3+ 17 Qxe3 Bf5 18 Bxf5 (18 Bb3 h6) 18 ... Qxf5 19 f4 h6 his knight would have been out of play.

16 ... Bxe3 17 Qxe3 h6

Forcing exchanges. If 17 ... Bf5!? Tarrasch recommended 18 Bb3! h6 19 Nf3 Rae8 20 Qd4 c6 21 Rfe1 with equal chances. Let us try continuing this variation: 21 ... Qc7! 22 a4 Be4 23 axb5 axb5 24 Ra7 Qb8 25 Nd2

Rxe5 26 Nxe4 Rxe4 27 Rxe4 dxe4 28 Qe3 with sufficient compensation for the pawn.



18 e6! (a spectacular breakthrough, leading to ... complete equality) **18 ... fxe6**

Of course, not 18 ... Bxe6? 19 Nxe6 Rfe8 20 Nc5.

19 Nxe6

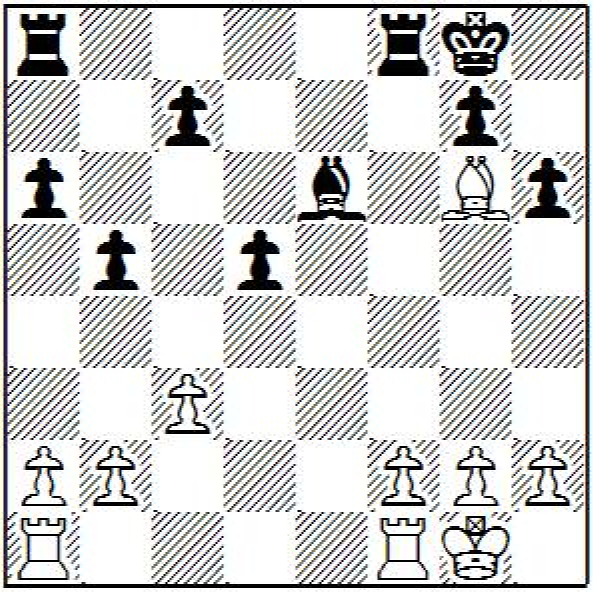
Tarrasch judged 19 Bxg6 hxg5 20 Qxg5 Bf5 21 Bxf5?! Rxf5 to be in favour of Black, but more accurate is 21 Rae1! Rf6 22 Bxf5 Rxf5 23 Qg3 with a level game.

19 ... Qxe6

19 ... Rfe8?! 20 Nc5 Rxe3 21 Nxd7 Re7! (21 ... Re2? 22 Bd1) 22 Nc5 favours White.

20 Qxe6+ Bxe6 21 Bxg6

The endgame is almost dead drawn, and Tarrasch offered a draw. But Chigorin, with a pawn majority on the queenside and the chance of being the first to create a passed pawn, declined ...



21 ... c5 22 Rfe1 Rf6 23 Bh5 Rd8 24 Re5! (preventing ... d5-d4) **24 ... Kf8**

‘Better was 24 ... g6!, then ... Bf7 and ... Rfd6.’ (Tarrasch) Black may stand a trifle better.

25 Rae1 Rd6?! (25 ... Bf7!) **26 f4! g6 27 Bxg6 Rxg6 28 f5 Rf6?**

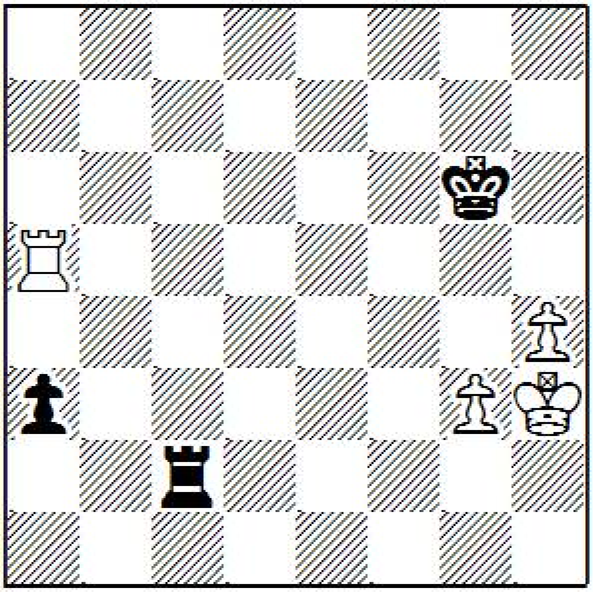
Much simpler was 28 ... Bxf5 29 Rxf5+ Rgf6 with a level game.

29 fxe6 Ke7 30 Rd1 Rfxe6 31 Rdxd5 Rxd5 32 Rxd5 Re2 33 Rxc5 Rxb2 34 Rc6

‘Although White has won a pawn, Black retains drawing chances, as usually happens in rook endings. 34 a4 bxa4 35 Ra5 Rc2 36 Rxa4 Rxc3 37 Rxa6 h5 38 Ra5 h4 39 Ra4 h3 would have led to a draw.’ (Tarrasch)

34 ... Rxa2 35 Rxh6 a5 36 h4 a4 37 Ra6 Rc2 38 Ra5 Kf6 39 Rxb5 Rxc3 40 Kh2 Kg6 41 Ra5 a3 42 g3 Rc2+ 43 Kh3

The key moment of the game.



43 ... Ra2?

An astounding lapse! After all, Kling and Horwitz had published analyses of this endgame back in the mid-19th century, and the method of gaining a draw was well known: 43 ... a2! 44 h5+ Kf6 45 g4 Rc5! (this is quicker than Tarrasch's suggestion of 45 ... Rb2 46 Kh4 Rh2+ 47 Kg3 Rb2 48 Ra6+ Kg7 49 h6+ Kf7 50 g5 Rb6 51 Rxa2 Kg6) 46 Rxa2 Kg5 47 Ra3 Rb5 or 44 Ra6+ Kf5 45 h5 Rc5! 46 Rxa2 Kg5 etc.

Incidentally, later it was Tarrasch who formulated the golden rule: a rook should stand behind a passed pawn! To the side of it, if absolutely necessary, but on no account in front of it ... This may now be a common truth, and no competent player will play 43 ... Ra2, but someone had to be the first to express it! It is the creation of a code of such general rules that comprises Tarrasch's historic service, the real achievement of his life ...

44 Kg4 Ra1 45 Ra6+ Kf7 46 Kg5 a2 47 g4 (but not 47 h5? Rg1) **47 ... Ke7 48 Ra7+ Ke8 49 h5 Kf8 50 h6 Rb1**

'Black nevertheless has to give up the pawn on account of the threat of 51 h7 Rh1 52 Kg6. The resulting ending of rook and two pawns against rook (the same as that won by Zukertort against Steinitz in London 1883) is rather difficult to play; in particular White has to guard against a premature h6-h7 in view of a possible stalemate.' (Tarrasch)

51 Rxa2 Kg8 52 Ra8+ Kh7 53 Ra7+ Kh8 54 Rf7 Rb5+ 55 Kg6 Rb6+ 56 Rf6 Rb8 57 g5 Ra8 58 Rf5

With the intention of Kh5 and g5-g6.

58 ... Kg8 59 Rd5!

Enviable accuracy! After 59 Kh5 Ra1 60 g6 Rh1+ 61 Kg5 Rg1+ 62 Kf6 Kh8 63 g7+ (63 h7? Rxg6+) 63 ... Kh7 64 Kf7 Rg2 things would have been far more difficult for White.

59 ... Rb8 60 Kh5 Ra8 61 g6 Kh8 62 Rf5

Threatening mate after h6-h7 and Kh6.

62 ... Rg8 63 g7+ 1-0

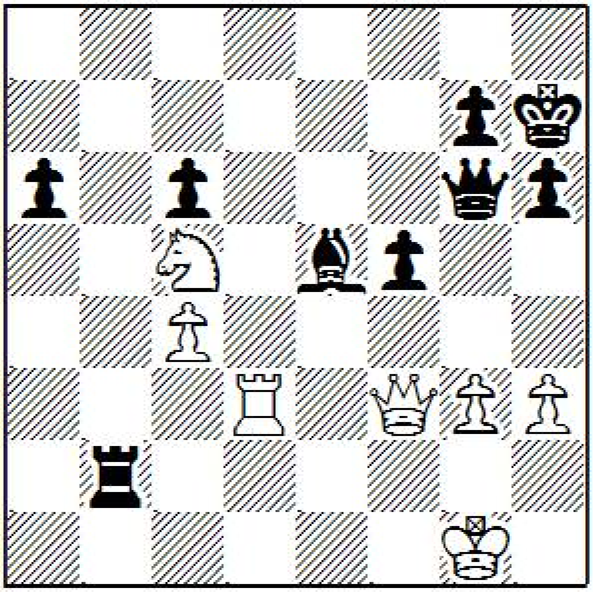
63 ... Kh7 64 Rf8 Rxf8 65 gxf8B or N – the only way! The game lasted eight hours.

In the 10th game the first draw in the match was recorded, and in the 11th Mikhail Ivanovich suffered yet another terrible catastrophe.

Game 29

S.Tarrasch-M.Chigorin

Match, St Petersburg 1893, 11th game



51 ... a5?!

Immediately decisive was 51 ... Qg5! with the threats of 52 ... Bxg3 and 52 ... Qc1+ 53 Rd1 Qc2.

52 Nd7 Bc7??

A nightmare! 'After 52 ... Bd6 Black would have won this subtly planned and powerfully conducted game.' (Tarrasch)

53 Nf8+ 1-0

The game lasted seven hours. To a considerable degree it was on account of this type of oversight that Chigorin succumbed to his mighty opponents ...

After seventeen games Tarrasch was leading 8-5 and was just two steps away from the cherished goal. But here the incredible happened: the strict Doctor lost three times in a row! Later he explained this by the incredibly cordial reception that he was given in St Petersburg: 'The lengthy night-time vigils till three, four and even six in the morning affected by usual freshness and readiness for battle. The lavish libations, which were awkward for me to decline, also played their part ... '

In the 18th game Chigorin won a famous rook endgame, to which analysts were returning even a whole century later.

Game 30

M.Chigorin-S.Tarrasch

Match, St Petersburg 1893, 18th game

French Defence C00

1 e4 e6 2 Qe2 Be7 3 b3

'A clever move, directed against ... d7-d5.' (Tarrasch) Harmless is 3 Nc3 d5 4 d3 Nf6 5 g3 0-0 (or 5 ... b6 6 Bg2 Bb7 7 Nh3 dxe4 8 Nxe4 Nxe4 9 Bxe4 Bxe4 10 Qxe4 Qd5 Chigorin-Maróczy, Nuremberg 1896) 6 Bg2 Nc6 7 Nf3 e5 (10th game).

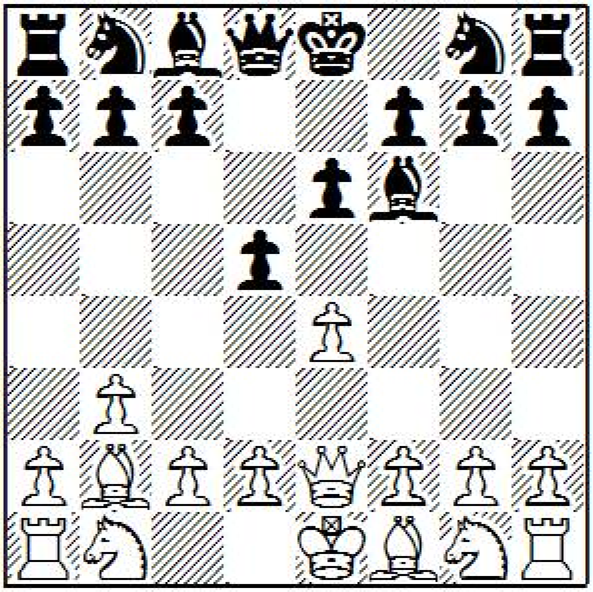
But another 'King's Indian trick' is also of interest: 3 g3 d5 4 d3 Nf6 (4 ... .b6!? Chigorin-Marco, Berlin 1897) 5 Bg2 0-0 6 Nh3!? c5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 c3! dxe4?! (8 ... b6! equalises) 9 dxe4 e5 10 Na3 h6 11 Nc2 Be6 12 f3 Qd7 13 Nf2 Rad8 14 Ne3 g5? 15 Kh1 Kh7 16 Qc2! Kh8 17 Nf5 Bxf5 18 exf5 Rg8 19 g4 Kg7 20 Re1 a6 21 Bf1! Rge8 22 Bd3 Qc7 23 h4! Rh8 24 Kg2 gxh4?! 25 Be4 Nd5 26 Bxd5! Rxd5 27 Ne4 Rhd8 28 Re2 Qd7 29 f6+! Bxf6 30 Bxh6+ Kxh6 31 Nxf6 1-0 (Chigorin-Zinkl, Berlin 1897).

3 ... d5

More artificial is 3 ... Bf6 4 Nc3 Nc6 5 Bb2 Nge7 6 f4 d6 7 Nf3 Ng6 8 g3 Bd7 9 h4 h5 10 0-0-0 etc. (Chigorin-Schiffers, St Petersburg 2nd matchgame 1897).

4 Bb2 Bf6

‘The normal 4 ... Nf6! allows the break-up of the kingside pawns – 5 exd5 exd5 (5 ... Qxd5?! 6 Nc3) 6 Bxf6 gxf6, but Black has excellent compensation for this in the form of his two bishops, the open g-file, and the weakening of the opponent’s queenside by b2-b3 (*say, 7 Nf3 Nc6 8 d4 Bg4 9 c3 Qd7 with equal chances – G.K.*). And after 5 e5 the game has the usual “French” character and Black is alright.’ (Tarrasch) For example: 5 ... Nfd7 6 g3 c5 7 Bg2 Nc6 8 f4 f5 9 Nf3 0-0 10 h4 Nb6 11 Nc3 Bd7 (Chigorin-Schiffers, St Petersburg 4th matchgame 1897). Against Alapin, Chigorin tried both 5 Nc3 0-0 6 f4 (Monte Carlo 1901) and 6 Nf3 (St Petersburg 1905), but also without success.



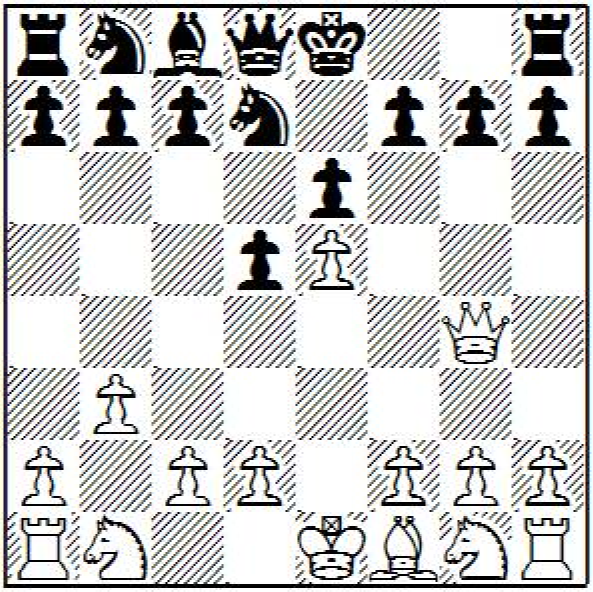
5 Bxf6?!

White changes course, despairing of gaining any advantage after 5 e5 (5 Nc3 dxe4 Chigorin-Burn, Vienna 1898) 5 ... Be7 6 Qg4 Bf8 7 Nf3 (7 Nh3 c5 8 f4 Nc6 9 a3 Nh6 12th game) 7 ... c5 8 Bb5+ (8 Nc3!? Keres) 8 ...

Bd7 9 Bxd7+ Qxd7 10 Nc3 Nc6 11 0-0 Nge7 (14th game), all of which are equal.

5 ... Nxf6 6 e5 Nfd7 7 Qg4

‘White needs to develop his bishop. He does not have time to fianchetto it: 7 f4 0-0 8 g3 f6 9 Nf3 fxe5 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 fxe5 Nc6 12 Bg2 Qg5!’ (Vasyukov, Nikitin)



7 ... 0-0

In the 20th game Tarrasch played 7 ... g6 – ‘for amusement’s sake, to see whether White would be able to exploit this weakening.’ After 8 f4 Nc6 (8 ... c5!?) 9 Nc3 Nb4 10 Kd1 Nc5 11 Qe2 a6 12 a3 Nc6 13 Nf3 b6 14 d4 Nd7 15 Qe3 Ne7 16 Bd3 c5 Black began an offensive on the queenside and by the 26th move he had obtained an overwhelming position. But here ... ‘My thinking apparatus stopped functioning normally,’ writes Tarrasch, ‘and I let slip a deserved win.’ And 30 moves later he also missed a draw ...

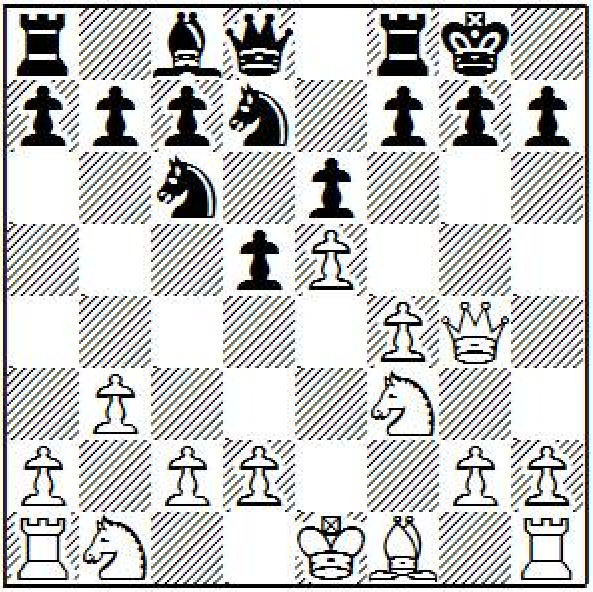
‘The strongest move is 7 ... Nxe5, suggested by Heyde in his book about the match; it refutes Chigorin’s entire favourite method of attack. After 8 Qxg7 Ng6 Black aims for the exchange of queens, which will give him the better game: 9 h4 Qe7 10 h5 f6 or 9 Bd3 f5 and ... Qe7.’ (Tarrasch)

8 f4 Nc6

‘Nowadays every master would first play 8 ... c5.’ (Botvinnik) But according to Tarrasch, ‘the knight move is much stronger, since the knight immediately threatens an attack on the queenside.’

9 Nf3

In the final, 22nd game, Mikhail Ivanovich ‘corrected himself’ with 9 c3, but after 9 ... d4! Black also gained the advantage (although he soon went wrong and lost in a titanic struggle). It is amusing that a theoretical duel in the match developed in a position where for White one already wants ... simply to resign!



9 ... f5?!

‘Missing the most appropriate moment for an attack – 9 ... Nb4!’ (Tarrasch). And indeed, bad now are both 10 Na3?! f5 11 Qg3 c5 12 c3 Qa5 13 cxb4 Qxa3 and 10 Nd4?! c5 11 a3 Qa5 12 c3 cxd4 13 cxb4 Qc7 (Chigorin). Only the awkward 10 Kd1 remains, when there can follow 10 ... c5 (Tarrasch considered 10 ... Nc5 and a possible ... Ne4) 11 c3 Nc6 12 Bd3 f5 13 Qh3 Nb6 (but not 13 ... c4? 14 Ng5) with an excellent game for Black.

10 Qh3 (threatening Ng5) **10 ... Re8 11 Nc3**

11 g4!? is unclear (Tarrasch).

11 ... Nf8 12 Be2?!

‘Typical of Chigorin: he prefers to avoid simplification, even at a high price. By playing 12 Bb5 and, given the opportunity, Bxc6, White would have insured himself against all dangers.’ (Botvinnik) ‘12 g4 was still very strong.’ (Tarrasch)

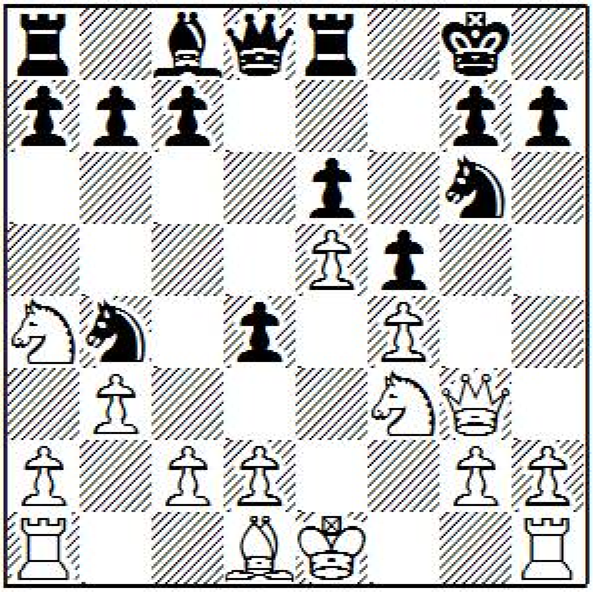
It is strange that no commentator considered the simple gain of space – 12 d4!? That is what I would play! For example: 12 ... Ng6 13 Qg3 Nb4 14 0-0-0 c5 15 h4 or 12 ... Nb4 13 0-0-0 c5 14 dxc5 Qa5 15 Kb2 Qxc5 16 a3 Nc6 17 g4 with double-edged play.

12 ... Ng6 13 Qg3

‘After 13 g3 the white queen would have been cut off from the centre and the c8-bishop would have developed dangerous activity on the c6-h1 diagonal.’ (Tarrasch)

13 ... d4 14 Na4 Nb4 15 Bd1

Prophylaxis against ... d4-d3.



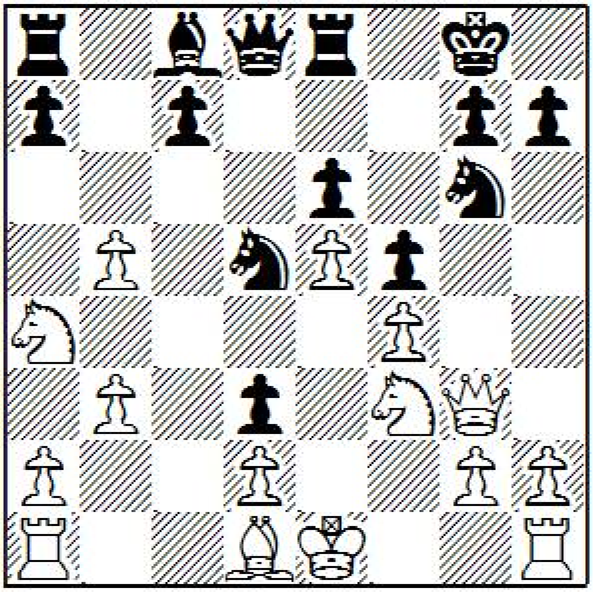
15 ... d3?!

‘The original cause of Black’s defeat. Correct was 15 ... b5 16 Nb2 c5 17 0-0 Bb7! with a clear advantage in the centre and on the queenside.’ (Botvinnik) However, the position after 18 Ng5 seems to me to be not altogether clear, and I would prefer Tarrasch’s recommendation 15 ... Nd5! 16 Nxd4 Ndxf4 17 Nf3 Bd7 18 Nc3 Bc6 ‘with an excellent game for Black, since White cannot castle in view of ... Bxf3 and ... Qxd2 or ... Qd4+.’

16 c4 b5?!

‘Rather a wild idea. By 16 ... Bd7 17 Nc3 Bc6 Black would have maintained a positional advantage and given the d3-pawn adequate support: 18 a3 Nc2+ 19 Bxc2 dxc2 and White is still unable to castle, or 18 0-0 a5 19 a3 Na6 and ... Nc5.’ (Tarrasch) Apparently the Doctor very much wanted to punish the opponent for his artificial play, and for some reason he gave up a pawn, at the same time creating a ‘hole’ in his position at c6.

17 cxb5 Nd5



18 Nd4!

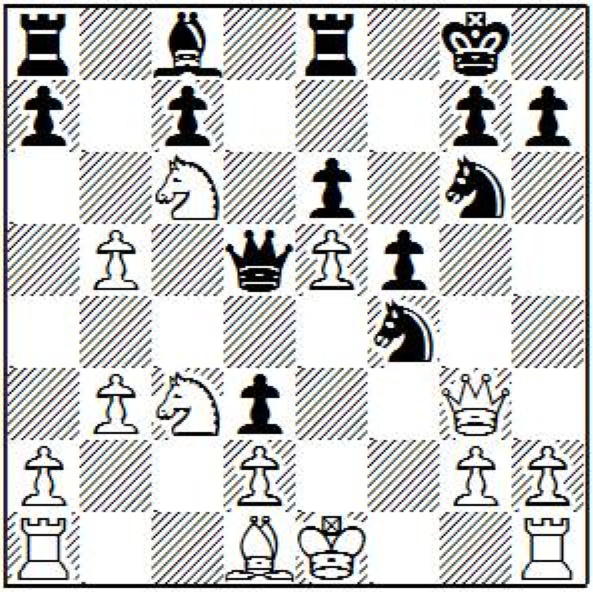
‘An excellent move, which can hardly have been anticipated by Tarrasch. If immediately 18 0-0, then 18 ... Ndxf4.’ (Botvinnik) True, here all is not clear after 19 Nc5.

18 ... Ndxf4

Inferior is 18 ... Ngxf4?! 19 0-0! Ng6 20 Nc6 Qh4 21 Qxh4 Nxh4 22 Nc5.

19 Nc6 Qd5 20 Nc3!

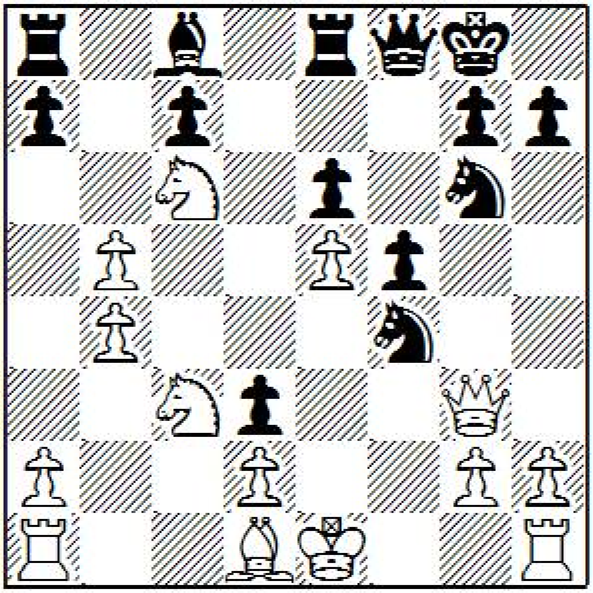
A not altogether obvious stroke. It would seem that from afar Tarrasch had calculated 20 Bf3?! Qxb5 with advantage to Black: 21 Ne7+ Rxe7 22 Bxa8 Qxe5+ or 21 Nc3 Qc5 22 b4 Qb6 23 Ne7+ Rxe7 24 Bxa8 c6 (24 ... Qxb4 will also do).



20 ... Qc5?

The losing move. ‘20 ... Qxg2! was essential – after 21 Bf3 Qxg3+ 22 hxg3 Nd5 23 Nxd5! (23 Bxd5? exd5 24 Nxd5 Bb7! wins for Black) 23 ... exd5 24 Bxd5+ Be6 the weakness of the e5-pawn would have promised Black an excellent game.’ (Tarrasch) At any event, he would not have been worse: 25 Bf3 a6 26 bxa6 Rxa6 27 Kf2 Bd7 28 Nb4 Ra3 etc.

21 b4! Qf8



22 0-0!

‘After castling only on the 22nd move, White immediately wins the d3-pawn, since the knight at f4 is forced to move.’ (Botvinnik)

22 ... Ne2+ (22 ... Nd5 23 Bf3!) **23 Nxe2 dxe2 24 Bxe2 Bd7 25 Qc3**

The stage of converting the advantage now begins.

25 ... Bxc6 26 bxc6 Kh8 27 d4

‘The simplest winning plan was Ba6-b7 and the capture of the a7-pawn with queen or rook (Rab1-b3-a3). 27 Bh5 was also very strong.’ (Tarrasch)

27 ... Red8 28 Bc4 Qf7 29 Rad1?! Ne7 30 b5 Nd5 31 Qf3?! (31 Qb3 is more accurate) **31 ... Qe7 32 a3?!** (32 Qb3!) **32 ... Nb6 33 Qb3**

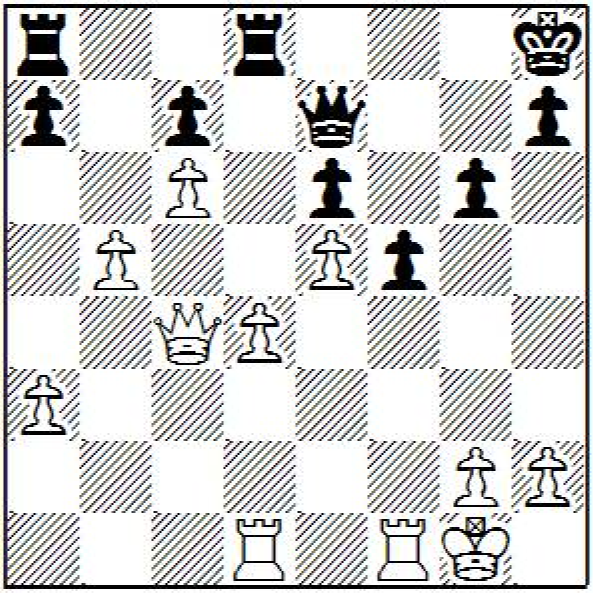
If 33 Ba2, then 33 ... a6!

33 ... Nxc4

‘If 33 ... Nd5 there would have followed 34 Bxd5 Rxd5 35 Rxf5 Rxd4 36 Rxd4 exf5 37 Qd5 h6 38 e6, and the win for White is not difficult.’ (Chigorin)

34 Qxc4 g6

Both 34 ... Rd5? 35 Rxf5 and 34 ... Qxa3? 35 Qxe6 Qe3+ 36 Kh1 Rxd4 37 Rxd4 Qxd4 38 Qxf5 were bad.



35 d5?

Whereas with his preceding moves Chigorin had let the win slip a little, this is simply a blunder leading to the loss of his extra pawn. Botvinnik recommended 35 a4 Rd5 36 Rd3 Kg7 37 Rb1 Kf7 38 a5 Rb8 39 Rb4 Kg7 40 Rd1 Kf7 41 Rdb1 when b5-b6 cannot be prevented, but 37 ... Qh4!? 38 Qb4 (or 38 Qc3) 38 ... Kg8 is more tenacious. Chigorin considered the similar variation 35 Qc5 Qf7! 36 a4 Rd5 37 Qc4, 'and nevertheless doubted whether the game could be won.'

But, as was shown by Tarrasch, after 35 Qc5 Qf7! White could have won by 36 d5! exd5 37 e6! Qxe6 38 Rfe1 Qd6 (38 ... Qf6 39 Re7 Rac8 40 Rd7 wins) 39 Qxd6 Rxd6 40 Re7 a6 (40 ... Rc8 41 Rde1 intending 42 Rd7) 41 a4 axb5 42 axb5 Rb8 43 Rxc7 Rxb5 44 Re1 Rb8 (or 44 ... Rd8 45 Ree7 d4 46 Rcd7 Rg8 47 c7) 45 Ree7 Rdd8 46 Rxh7+ Kg8 47 Rcg7+ Kf8 48 c7 Rb1+ 49 Kf2 Rc8 50 Rd7 Ke8 (50 ... Kg8 51 Rhe7 Kf8 52 Re5) 51 Rd8+ Rxd8 52 Rh8+.

35 ... exd5 36 Rxd5 Rxd5 37 Qxd5 Rd8! (this is the point!) **38 Qa2**

Or 38 Qc4 Qxe5 with equal chances.

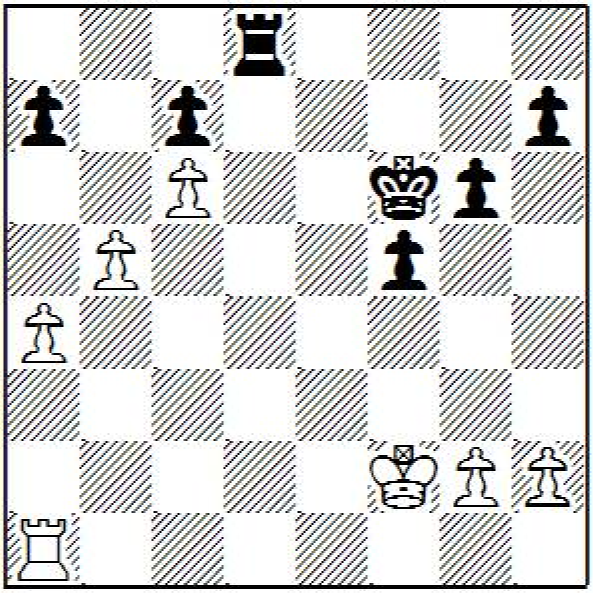
38 ... Qxe5

For some reason none of the commentators mentioned the obvious 38 ... Qc5+! 39 Qf2 Qxb5 (picking up an important pawn) 40 Qxa7 Qxe5 with a dead draw!

39 Qa1!

The transition into a rook ending leaves White with some practical winning chances.

39 ... Qxa1 (but not 39 ... Rd4? 40 Re1 Qf6 41 Re6! Rd1+ 42 Qxd1 Qxe6 43 Qd8+ Qg8 44 Qxc7 and wins) **40 Rxa1 Kg7 41 Kf2 Kf6 42 a4**



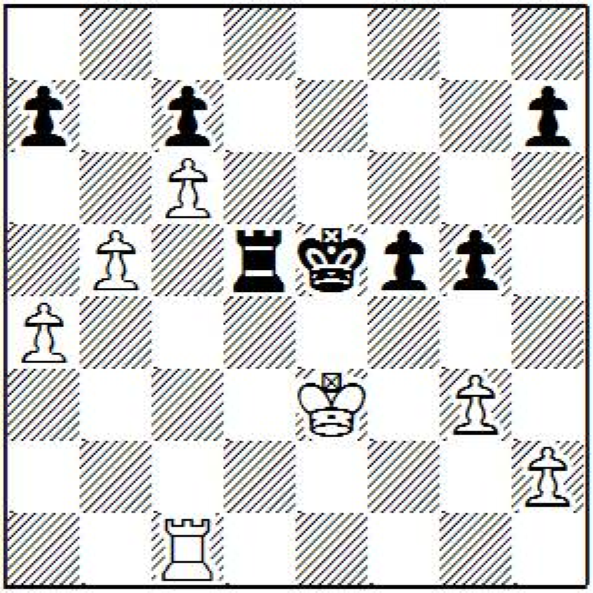
42 ... Rd5

Tarrasch called White’s advantage ‘enormous’, whereas according to Botvinnik it is only ‘definite’ and he recommended the simplifying 42 ... a6!? 43 Rb1 axb5 44 Rxb5?! Rd6 45 Rc5 Rd4 46 a5 Ke6 47 Ke3 Ra4 and ... Kd6 equalising, or 43 Ke3 Ke6 44 h4 Rd5 45 Rb1 axb5 46 axb5 Kd6 and White is tied to the defence of his b5-pawn.

43 Ke3 Ke5 44 Rc1 g5

It is too late for 44 ... a6? 45 b6!; 44 ... f4+!? 45 Kf3 Rd4 46 a5 Rb4 47 Rc5+ Kd6 (Tarrasch).

45 g3



45 ... h5

‘The decisive mistake. After the calm 45 ... Kd6 it is doubtful whether White would have been able to invade (considering that after the exchange of rooks he loses): 46 Rc4 Re5+ 47 Kf3 (47 Kd3 Rd5+, and 48 Kc3? is not possible because of 48 ... Rc5) 47 ... Rd5, and the danger of the b5-b6 breakthrough is not so great.’ (Tarrasch) ‘Simpler and stronger was 45 ... h6, supporting the g5-pawn.’ (Botvinnik)

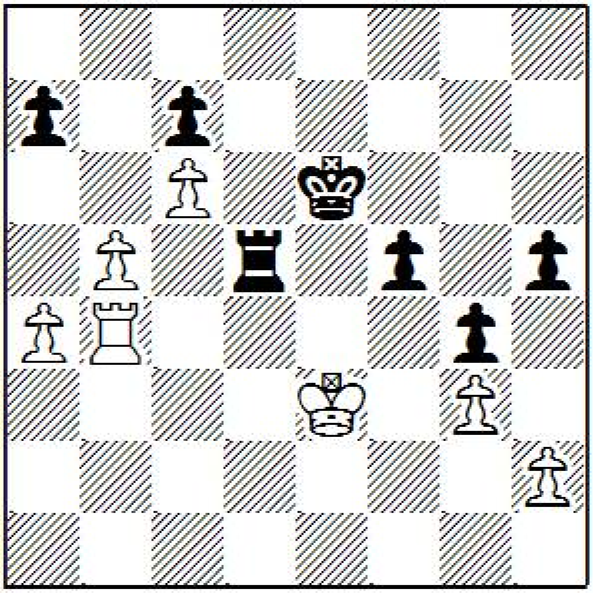
However, as we will see, the plan of defence chosen by Black in the game was also not at all bad.

46 Rc4 g4

Fixing the h2-pawn! ‘The exchange of rooks would now have led to a loss for Black: 46 ... Rd1 47 Rc5+ (*47 h4 gxh4 48 gxh4 Re1+ 49 Kd2 Ra1! – G.K.*) 47 ... Rd5 48 Rxd5+ Kxd5 49 h4!’ writes Tarrasch, having in mind 49 ... gxh4 50 gxh4 Kc5 51 Kf4 Kb4 52 Kg5 Kxa4? 53 Kxh5 Kxb5 54 Kg5 a5 55 h5 a4 56 h6 a3 57 h7 a2 58 h8Q, but overlooking the deadly 52 ... f4! 53 Kxf4 Kxa4 54 Kg5 Kxb5 55 Kxh5 a5 and wins. Botvinnik suggested 47 ... Ke6 48 a5 Rb1 49 Kd3 Kf6 50 Kc2 Rb4 51 Kc3 Rb1 52 Rd5 Ke6 53 Rd7 Rxb5 54 Rxc7 Rxa5 with equality, regarding the move ... g5-g4 as merely ‘a new weakening’.

47 Rb4 Ke6

‘Black should have played 47 ... Kd6, for example: 48 Rd4 Rxd4! (*but not 48 ... Kc5? 49 Rxd5+ Kxd5 50 Kf4 Kc5 51 Kxf5 Kb4 52 Ke6! – G.K.*) 49 Kxd4 Ke6 50 a5 Kd6 51 a6 Ke6 52 Ke3 Kd6 53 Kd4 and a draw is inevitable.’ (Botvinnik) But should he really? ...



48 a5!

The only chance: 48 Rd4 Re5+! 49 Kd3 Re1 50 Kd2 Rh1 is equal (Botvinnik).

48 ... Kf6

Vasyukov and Nikitin recommend 48 ... Rc5!? (48 ... Ke5? 49 b6 axb6 50 axb6 cxb6 51 c7 Rc5 52 Rb5! wins; 48 ... Kd6 49 Rb2! and Kf4 with some initiative) 49 Kf4 Kf6 or 49 Kd4 Kd6, impeding the white king, and summarise: ‘Black plays uncertainly and with every move he worsens his position.’ We shall see, we shall see ...

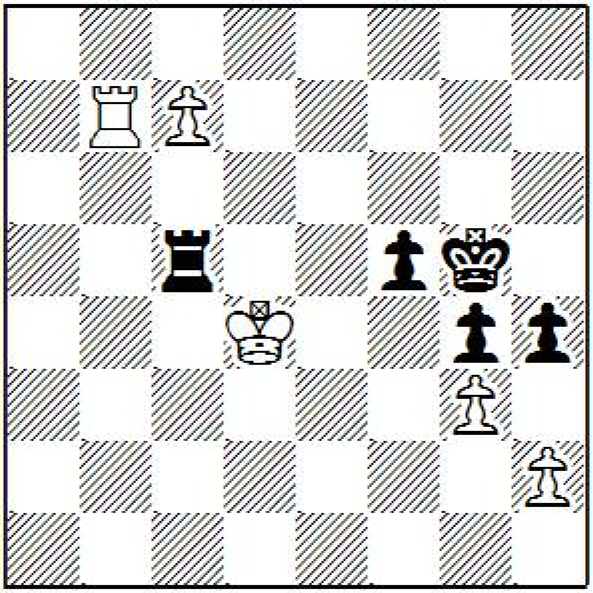
49 b6 axb6 50 axb6 cxb6 51 c7! Rc5 52 Rxb6+ Kg5

‘The decisive mistake. 52 ... Kf7! would still have retained drawing chances – 53 Rb7 Ke6 54 Kf4 Kd7 55 c8Q+ Kxc8 56 Rh7 Rc2 57 Rxh5 Rf2+ 58 Ke5 Kd7 59 Rxf5 Rxh2 60 Kf4 Ke6 61 Kxg4 Rh8 and a draw (Botvinnik).

But 102 years after the game(!) the Russian master Fridstein showed on the pages of the magazine *Shakhmaty v Rossii* (1995, No.2) that Black had been written off too early.

53 Rb7 h4 54 Kd4

The culminating point of this exciting battle, which was not noticed by any of the earlier commentators.



54 ... Rc1?

Here it is, the decisive mistake! 'After 54 ... Rc2! 55 Ke5 (55 Kd3 Rc6 or 55 gxh4+ Kxh4 is pointless) 55 ... h3! everything is clear – White has no winning chances: 56 Ra7 Re2+ 57 Kd6 Rd2+ 58 Kc6 Rxh2 59 c8Q Rc2+ 60 Kd7 Rxc8 61 Kxc8 h2 62 Rh7 f4. Had Tarrasch found this resource, the tone of the comments would no doubt have been completely different and about his play they would have written "a brilliant defence". Such is the price of one bad move!' (Fridstein)

55 Ke5 hxg3 56 hxg3 Rc3

'Black also fails to save the game by 56 ... f4 57 gxf4+ Kh4 58 Kd6 Rd1+ (*or 58 ... g3 59 Rb8 g2 60 c8Q Rxc8 61 Rxc8 g1Q 62 Rh8+ and Rg8+ – G.K.*) 59 Ke7 Rc1 60 Kd7 Rd1+ 61 Kc8 g3 62 Kb8 Rc1 63 c8Q Rxc8+ 64 Kxc8 Kg4 65 Rf7! Kf3 66 f5 g2 67 Rg7. This is by no means the only way to win; there are also others.' (Chigorin)

57 Kd6 (57 Ra7!) **57 ... Rd3+ 58 Ke7 Re3+ 59 Kd6 Rd3+ 60 Ke5 Rc3 61 Ra7! f4**

After 61 ... Rc1 62 Kd6 the king hides from the checks at a8 and the c7-pawn queens.

62 Kd4! 1-0

62 ... Rc1 63 Ra5+ and 64 Rc5. ‘This entire difficult and interesting ending was played with great mastery by Chigorin. The game lasted eight hours.’ (Tarrasch)

Another vivid illustration of the strong and weak sides of both contenders for the throne, and of Chigorin in particular. He played very creatively, and riskily in the strategic sense. And again Tarrasch, after gaining an excellent position, got himself entangled: in complicated, irrational play he was nevertheless inferior to his opponent! But when the time came to defend, he defended very well. However, Chigorin made rather a mess of converting his enormous advantage and even blundered a pawn. Fortunately, in the endgame his opponent, already anticipating a draw, created some minor difficulties for himself and overlooked a critical moment.

Tarrasch steadfastly survived the three successive defeats and in the 21st game he gained his ninth win. But in the 22nd he missed a simple draw, and with it victory in the match: the grandiose battle ended with a score of +9 -9 =4.

For the proud Doctor this was an unpleasant surprise: after all, he had played the match ‘more correctly’ than Chigorin (he was in general a ‘correct’ player) and, by the logic of things, he should have won, but ... the purely chess potential of his opponent proved to be higher! It was another matter that Chigorin often lacked accuracy in the realisation of his cosmic ideas – this can happen with great masters.

In the historic sense it was very important that the new Steinitz-Tarrasch School had at that time such a powerful opponent. Since when creative disputes die away in chess, stagnation begins! It was in the big matches that there was a fierce head-to-head clash of different creative tendencies, one could even say of different chess ideologies, and it was in the course of these clashes that modern chess thinking took shape. As they say, in disputes the truth was born ...

Steinitz was not only the first to express his positional principles, but also – this is another of his historical merits – he created a tradition whereby leading masters, in contrast to the stars of the past, considered it a matter of honour to formulate and uphold their chess views. Perhaps not as revolutionary as those of the first world champion, but also principles! Thus Chigorin, who criticised Steinitz for his ‘abstraction’ and the somewhat dogmatic nature of his theory, advocated a different, concrete approach to chess, and was also perpetually searching and contemplating paths of his own.

Generally speaking, the tradition of not only winning a game, but also explaining why it was won, dates back to Philidor. But he was guided by excessively general concepts, which at the end of the 19th century no longer worked – so greatly had the level of chess understanding risen. And since from the time of Philidor nothing significant in this field had occurred, it can be considered that it was Steinitz who opened the era of the scientific explanation of chess wins. The great Steinitz-Chigorin confrontation was perhaps the first stage in this era. The champion deservedly won, and his theory became the dominating one.

However, modern chess is unthinkable without the contribution made by Chigorin. In contrast, say, to Zukertort, an outstanding student and to some extent an imitator of Anderssen, Mikhail Ivanovich put forward a number of completely new, revolutionary ideas and entire trends. But they, like many of Steinitz's views, could not then win complete recognition, since they were ahead of their time (that was the case, for example, with the first 'King's Indian experiments'). And in addition, Chigorin was not always able to demonstrate his correctness at the board: like his historic opponent, he was excessively obstinate in upholding his opening set-ups, which suffered from serious positional defects.

The Tarrasch-Chigorin match became an important stage in the development of chess understanding. True, while they were determining in St Petersburg which of them was the main challenger, in distant America the impatient Lasker had persuaded Steinitz to play him in a match for the world crown. And in the spring of 1894 the world acquired a new, young chess king.

It is appropriate to recall that a year later Lasker declined an offer by the St Petersburg Chess Society to organise a match between him and Chigorin, and their first meeting took place in August 1895, at the start of the historic tournament in Hastings. In this famous game Chigorin chose an unusual defence, which bears his name in opening theory.

Game 31

Em.Lasker-M.Chigorin

Hastings 1895, 2nd round
Chigorin Defence D07

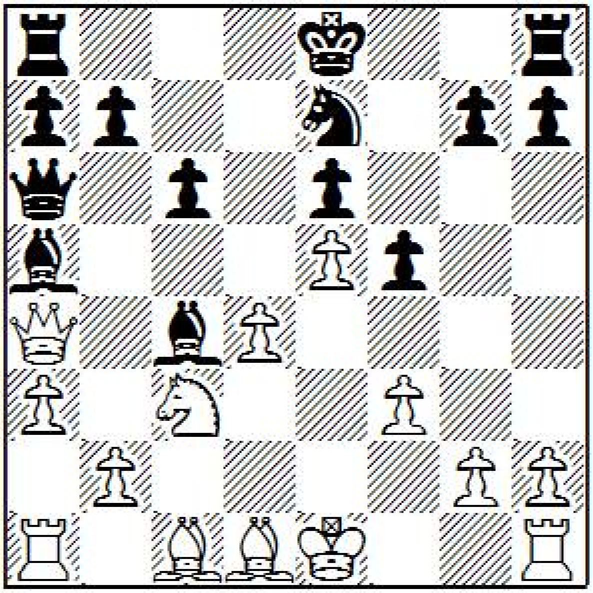
1 d4 d5 2 Nf3

If 2 c4 there would have followed 2 ... Nc6!? The idea of piece pressure on the centre followed by the attack and blockade of it was far ahead of its time, anticipating the discoveries of the hypermodern era: the Alekhine Defence, the Grünfeld Defence, and the whole complex of Nimzo-Indian set-ups (it was no wonder that Nimzowitsch called Chigorin his teacher!).

2 ... Bg4 3 c4 Bxf3

Chigorin more often began with 3 ... Nc6 – 4 e3 e6 (after 4 ... e5?! Steinitz played 5 Qb3!) 5 Nc3 Bb4 6 Bd2 Nge7, or 6 Qb3 Bxf3 (6 ... Nge7!? 7 Bd2 0-0; 6 ... Bxc3+!? 7 bxc3 Bxf3 8 gxf3 Na5 9 Qc2 Nxc4 10 Bxc4 dxc4 11 Qa4+ c6 12 Qxc4 Qd5!) 7 gxf3 Nge7 8 Bd2 0-0 etc.

In my opinion, more lively is 4 cxd5 Bxf3 5 gxf3! Qxd5 6 e3 (Kasparov-Smyslov, Vilnius 11th matchgame 1984). But not 5 dxc6 Bxc6 6 Nc3 e6 7 e4 Bb4! 8 f3 f5! The battle for the light squares! The game Pillsbury-Chigorin (St Petersburg 1895/96) continued 9 e5?! (correct is 9 Bc4! Qh4+ 10 g3 Qe7 11 0-0 with sharp play) 9 ... Ne7 (9 ... Qh4+!? 10 g3 Qh5 11 Bg2 0-0-0 12 0-0 is unclear) 10 a3 Ba5 11 Bc4 Bd5 12 Qa4+?! (better are both 12 Qb3 and 12 Bxd5 Nxd5 13 Qb3, or 12 ... Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 Qxd5 14 Rb1 b5 15 Bg5) 12 ... c6 13 Bd3 Qb6! 14 Bc2 Qa6! 15 Bd1 (15 b4 Qc4! 16 Bb2 Bb6 etc.) 15 ... Bc4!



16 f4? (more tenacious was 16 b4 Bb6 17 Qxa6 Bxa6 18 Be3 Rd8 – 18 ... f4?! 19 Bf2 Nf5 20 Be2! Bxd4 21 Bxd4 Nxd4 22 Bxa6 bxa6 23 0-0-0 – 19 Be2 Bxe2 20 Nxe2 Nd5) 16 ... 0-0-0 17 Be3? (essential was 17 b4 Bb6 18 Qxa6 bxa6 19 Ne2 a5) 17 ... Nd5 18 Bd2 Nb6 19 Qc2 Rxd4 20 Rc1 (20 Kf2 Nd5!) 20 ... Bd3 21 Qb3 Nc4 22 Kf2 Nxd2 23 Qxe6+ Kb8 24 Bf3 Qb6 25 Kg3 Nxf3 26 gxf3 Bc4 27 Qxf5 Bxc3 28 bxc3 Rd2 ... 0-1. The young Pillsbury did not understand this unfamiliar position. Lasker would not have lost so feebly!

4 gxf3 Nc6 5 Nc3 e6 6 e3 Bb4 7 cxd5 Qxd5!?

7 ... exd5 is more solid, but it is piece pressure on the centre that Chigorin wants to create.

8 Bd2

An example from the play of the 10th world champion: 8 Bg2 Qd7 9 0-0 Nge7 10 f4 Rd8 11 a3 Bxc3 12 bxc3 Na5 13 Qh5 (13 Qc2!?) 13 ... b6 14 a4 Nd5 15 Ba3 Nc4 16 Rfc1 c5 17 Qe2 Nxa3 18 Rxa3 0-0 with equal chances (Taimanov-Spassky, 27th USSR Championship, Leningrad 1960).

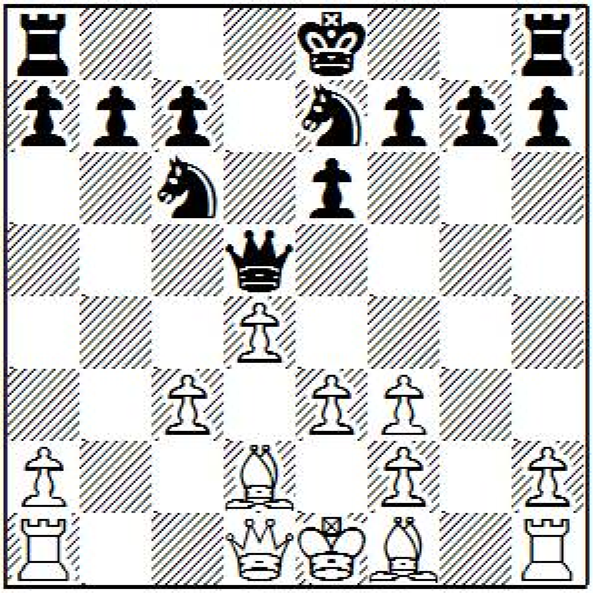
8 ... Bxc3

The demonstrative exchange of bishops for knights was a reproach to the new school, which gave an obvious preference to bishops and a strong pawn centre. Incidentally, it was thanks to Chigorin that skilful play with the knights came to be regarded as a distinguishing feature of the ‘Russian Chess School’.

8 ... Qd7 is more flexible, for example: 9 Qa4?! Nge7 10 Bb5?! a6 11 a3 Bxc3 12 Bxc3 0-0 13 Be2 Nd5 14 Bd2 Rad8 15 Rc1 e5! 16 dxe5 Nf4! with advantage to Black (Steinitz-Chigorin, London 1899). Of course, more is promised by 9 f4! Nge7 10 Bg2.

9 bxc3 Nge7

‘Chigorin, a genius of practical play, considers it his privilege at every convenient opportunity to challenge the principles of contemporary chess theory,’ Steinitz wrote about the opening of this game. And he was right!



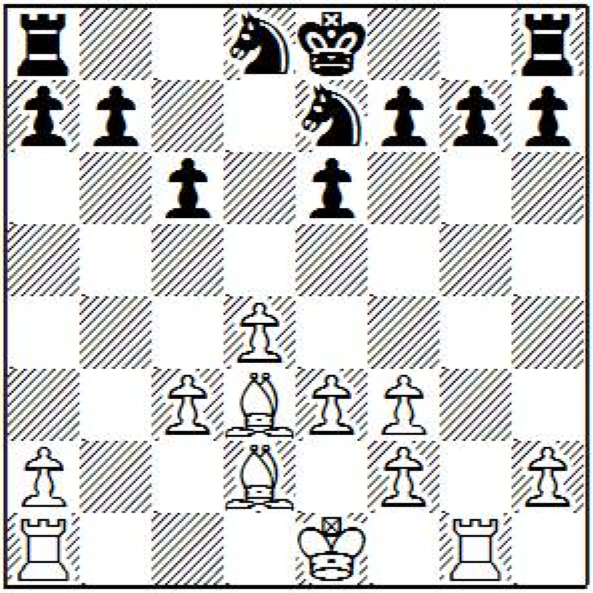
10 Rg1 (the alternative was 10 c4 and 11 f4) **10 ... Qh5**

‘Stronger was 10 ... 0-0 11 c4 (if 11 Qb3 there can follow 11 ... Qxf3 12 Bg2 Qh5 13 Qxb7 Qxh2 14 0-0-0 Rab8!) 11 ... Qh5 12 Bc3 Ng6 13 Rg3 e5 14 d5 Nce7.’ (Vasyukov, Nikitin)

11 Qb3! (with the threat of 12 Rxg7 Ng6 13 Qxb7) **11 ... Nd8?!**

‘After the natural 11 ... 0-0 12 Rg3 (12 Qxb7 Qxh2 13 Rg3 Rfc8 followed by ... Ra8-b8-b6 and ... Nf5 is most probably favourable to Black) 12 ... Nd8 13 e4! Ng6 14 Rh3 Qa5 15 Bd3 e5! the resulting position, although better for White, is one where Black has definite counterplay.’ (Vasyukov, Nikitin)

12 Qb5+! (but not 12 Rxg7? Ng6) **12 ... Qxb5 13 Bxb5+ c6 14 Bd3**



By present-day measures this endgame is already virtually a win for White: his two mighty bishops give him an enormous advantage. But Black plays on as though nothing has happened ...

14 ... Ng6 15 f4 0-0 16 Ke2 (it is too early for 16 f5? on account of 16 ... Nh4) **16 ... Rc8?!**

An inaccurate implementation of the correct plan with ... c6-c5-c4. 16 ... f5 was essential, although here too after 17 a4 Rc8 18 Bc1 Rf7 19 Ba3 all the chances are with White.

17 Rg3

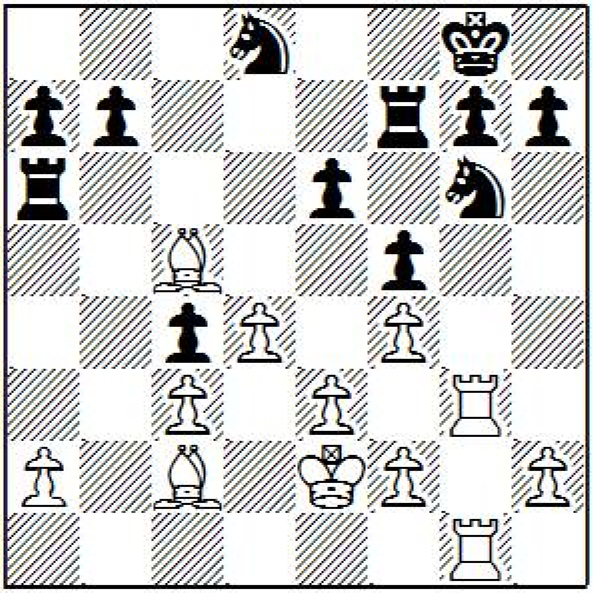
Serious consideration should have been given to opening the game by 17 f5! exf5 18 Bxf5 Rc7 19 c4 (Levenfish), or 18 ... Ne6 19 f4 Rfe8 20 Kf2 with a solid advantage.

17 ... c5 18 Rag1?

It was not yet too late for 18 f5!, but Lasker has another idea. ‘White is planning an attack with 19 h4 or 19 f5. This looks rather menacing, but it is comparatively easily refuted.’ (Romanovsky)

18 ... c4! 19 Bc2 f5! 20 Bc1 Rf7! 21 Ba3 Rc6! 22 Bc5 Ra6

Black successfully manoeuvres ‘in Nimzowitsch’s blockading style’ and Lasker is unable to demonstrate the advantages of his position.



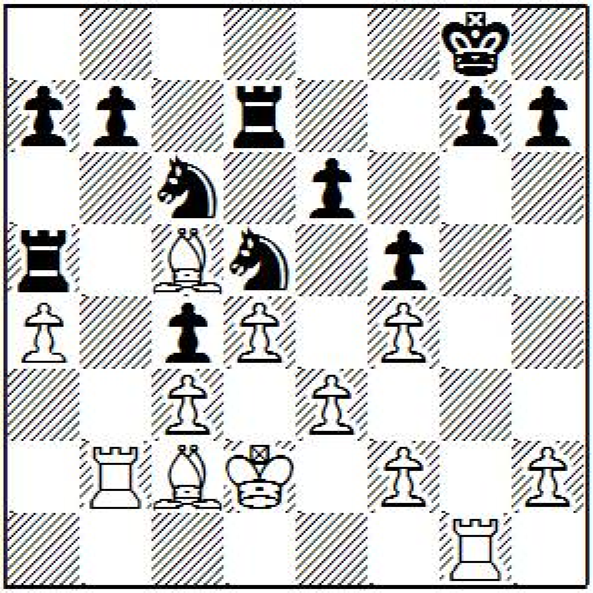
23 a4

This self-restriction of the c2-bishop is forced: weak is 23 a3?! b6 24 Bb4 Nc6 25 a4 Nxb4 26 cxb4 Ne7 and ... Nd5!

23 ... Nc6 24 Rb1 Rd7 25 Rgg1 Nge7 26 Rb2

By 26 Bxe7!? Nxe7 27 Kd2 Nd5 28 Rb5 White would still have retained some edge.

26 ... Nd5 27 Kd2 Ra5



White’s centre has become fixed, his bishops ‘apathetic’ ... With his original manner of play (how could he shut in his own rook at a5?!) Chigorin confused the great Lasker! The champion is unable to hit on any useful plan.

28 Rgb1 b6 29 Ba3 g6 30 Rb5 Ra6! 31 Bc1 Nd8

‘Black’s manoeuvring, although forced, is by no means of a waiting nature. With the threat of penetrating with his knight to e4 he wants to induce f2-f3 and then mount an attack on the enemy pawn in the centre.’ (Romanovsky)

32 Ra1 Nf7 (32 ... Nb7 33 Ba3 Na5 is also interesting) **33 Rbb1?!**

In view of Black’s possible reply, better was 33 Ba3!? (but not 33 h4 Nd6 34 Rbb1 Ne4+!), preventing both 33 ... g5 34 Rg1! and 33 ... Nd6 34 Bxd6! Rxd6 35 a5.

33 ... Nd6?!

According to Steinitz, 33 ... g5! was strong. Then ‘White would face an unpleasant choice: whether to give up his f4-pawn or allow the invasion of the knight at e4 after 34 fxg5 Nxg5.’ (Vasyukov, Nikitin) Here Chigorin’s knights really are good!

‘Steinitz thought that 33 ... g5 34 fxg5 Nxg5 35 Ra3 Ne4+ 36 Bxe4 fxe4 followed by 37 ... Rg7 would have led to a winning attack. Later Levenfish pointed out that 35 Bb2 was a bolder move for White, but even here after 35 ... Ne4+ 36 Bxe4 fxe4 Black’s dominant knight forces the position to be evaluated in his favour. True, his advantage is hardly sufficient for a win: there can follow 37 Rg1+ Rg7 38 Rxg7+ Kxg7 39 Ke2 (preparing f2-f3) with quite good resources for a tenacious struggle for a draw.’ (Romanovsky)

34 f3! (at last White has hit on the correct idea of the e3-e4 break) **34 ... Nf7 35 Ra3!**

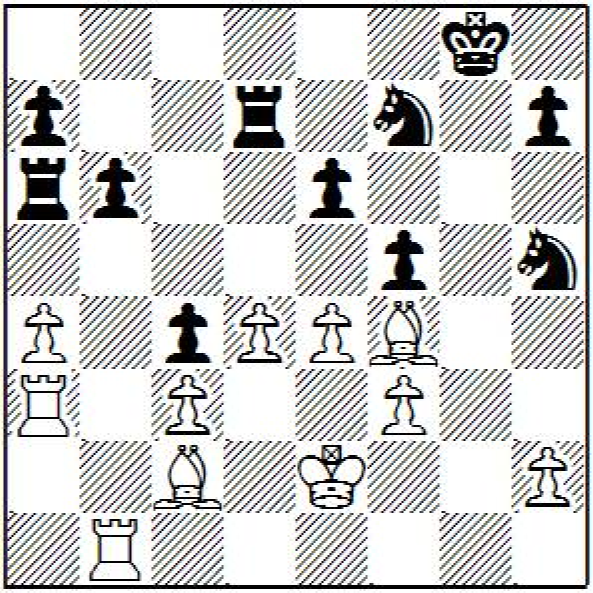
Freeing the king from having to defend the c3-pawn.

35 ... g5?!

At the wrong time! If 35 ... Ra5, then 36 Ke2! and e3-e4. However, he could have tried to create a fortress by 35 ... Nd6! 36 Ke2 Rf7! 37 Bd2 Ra5.

True, according to Romanovsky ‘it is very doubtful whether Black could have prevented the advance of the e-pawn, for example: 37 ... Kf8 38 Kf2 Ke7 39 Kg3 Kf6 40 Raa1, then Rf1, Rae1 and nevertheless e3-e4.’

36 Ke2! (threatening 37 fxg5 Nxg5 38 e4) **36 ... gxf4 37 e4 Nf6 38 Bxf4!** (the game is opened up to White’s obvious advantage) **38 ... Nh5**



39 Be3?!

In a time scramble White misses a chance to consolidate his unexpected advantage. Previous commentators recommended 39 Bd2, but to me the most promising seems to be 39 Rg1+!? Kf8 40 Bc1! Ra5 41 Ra1.

39 ... f4! (again a blockade!) **40 Bf2 Ra5?!**

More consistent was 40 ... e5! 41 Rg1+ Kf8, when 42 dxe5?! Nxe5 43 Rg5? is bad on account of 43 ... Rd2+!

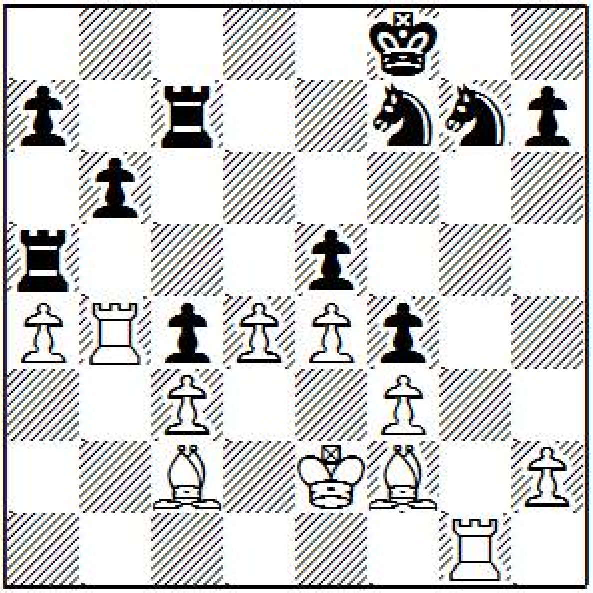
41 Rg1+ Kf8

41 ... Rg5 42 Rxg5+ Nxg5 43 a5! favours White.

42 Raa1?! (42 e5! b5 43 Raa1 was more energetic) **42 ... e5! 43 Rab1 Ng7 44 Rb4**

Also after 44 d5!? Ne8 45 Bh4 Nh8 46 Rg5 Ng6 47 Bf2 Black has a rather indifferent position.

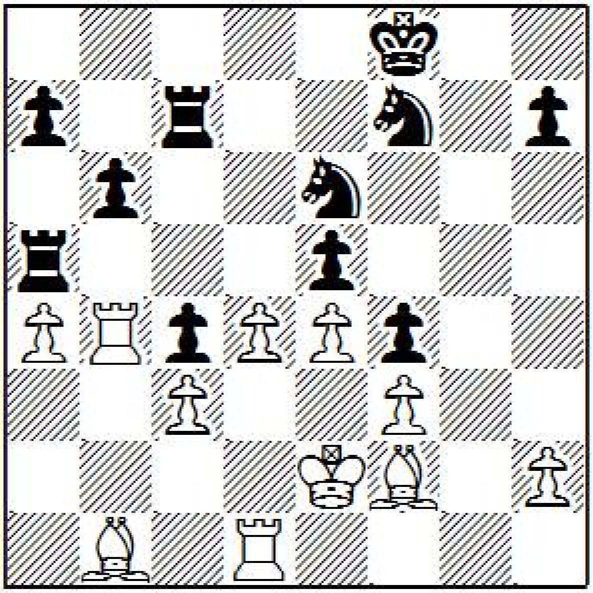
44 ... Rc7



45 Bb1?!

45 Rb5 Rxb5 46 axb5 Nd6 47 Ba4 suggests itself.

45 ... Ne6 46 Rd1?! (46 Ba2!)



46 ... Ned8!

The play is ‘seesawing’. In a difficult situation Chigorin plays with uncommon resourcefulness (... Nc6 is threatened), and at a critical instant Lasker is unable to withstand the tension ...

47 Rd2?

A blunder. 47 d5 Nd6 48 Bc2 N8b7 49 Rg1 Rg7 50 Rxg7 Kxg7 would have suited Black, but the calm 47 Bc2! would still have left White with the better chances.

Vasyukov and Nikitin recommended ‘opening the game by 47 dxe5! Nc6 48 e6! – but not 48 Rb5 Rxb5 49 axb5 Ncxe5 50 Rd5 Ke7! (*although here White has the advantage: 51 Bd4 Ke6 52 h4 – G.K.*) – 48 ... Nfe5 49 Bc2 Nd3 50 Rb5, and Black would have had to overcome the greatest difficulties.’ But after 48 ... Nxb4! 49 cxb4 Rxa4 50 exf7 Rxb4 he would have overcome them very quickly.

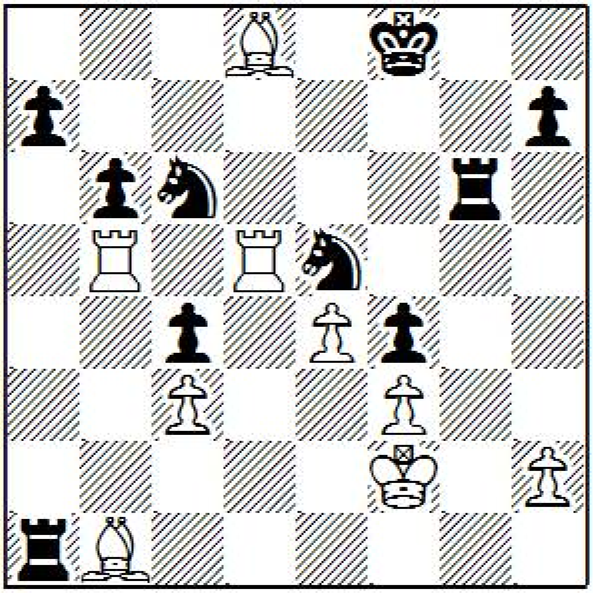
47 ... Nc6!

Now the initiative securely passes to Black, and Lasker is unable to save the game.

48 Rb5

Both 48 Rxc4? Nd6! and 48 Bc2? exd4 49 Bxd4 Nxb4 50 cxb4 Rh5 are also bad.

48 ... Rxa4 49 dxe5 Nfxe5 (the time has come to talk about the advantage of the two knights!) **50 Bh4?! Rg7 51 Kf2 Rg6 52 Rdd5 Ra1 53 Bd8**



53 ... Nd3+! 54 Bxd3 (54 Kf1 Ncb4! with mate) **54 ... cxd3 55 Rxd3**

If 55 Bg5, then 55 ... Rxg5! 56 Rxg5 d2.

55 ... Rag1! 56 Rf5+ Ke8 57 Bg5 (desperation: 57 Rxf4 R6g2+ 58 Ke3 Re1 mate) **57 ... R6xg5 0-1**

What a crushing defeat!

In this ultra-tense, far from faultless duel, it is not so much variations that are important, as the text of the game itself: Chigorin was after all playing the world champion, and, as always, he upheld his principles! In the given instance, this was a struggle of two knights against two bishops in a semi-closed position and the blockade of a pawn centre. And on the whole, although Lasker gained the better chances, he did not demonstrate a superiority in strategic manoeuvring. In the complicated play Chigorin maintained this flexibility of thinking throughout the entire game. It is not surprising that later Lasker always aimed to play more simply against him.

In the opinion of many, the Russian master played better than anyone else in the tournament. Before the 20th, penultimate round, he was in sole first place! But here, after failing to withstand the tension and ‘violating the competitive regime’, he lost an unthinkable game with White to Janowski, probably the worst in his life.

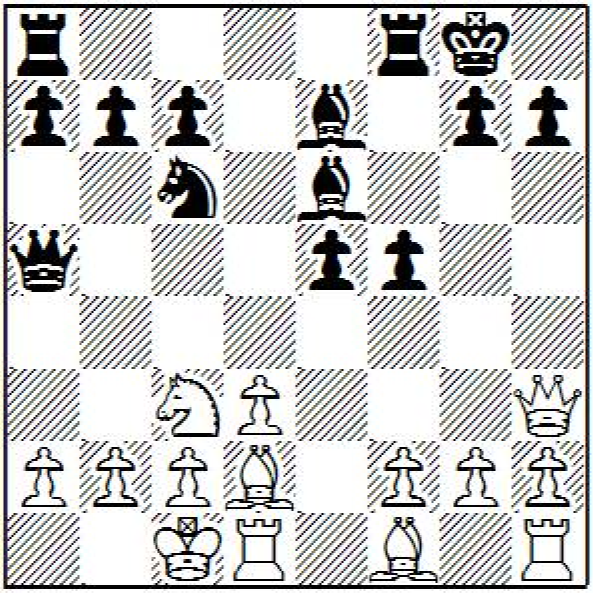
Game 32

M.Chigorin-D.Janowski

Hastings 1895, 20th round

Vienna Game C26

1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 d3 (Chigorin never used to play this!) **3 ... d5 4 exd5? Nxd5 5 Qe2? Nc6 6 Bd2? Be7 7 0-0-0? 0-0 8 Qf3?? Be6 9 Nge2 f5 10 Qh3 Qd6 11 Nxd5? Qxd5 12 Nc3 Qa5**



13 a3? Bxa3 14 Nb1 Bxb2+ 15 Kxb2 Qa2+ 16 Kc1 Nd4, and White resigned. The numerous question marks to the white moves were attached by the victim himself.

This occurrence, in my opinion, is even more tragic than the finish to the 23rd game of the second match with Steinitz (*Game No.26*). Truly, as Tal used to say, every chess player forges his own tournament fortune! As a result Mikhail Ivanovich finished half a point behind the winner, Pillsbury, after defeating him in their individual game (first round, King’s Gambit), and finishing ahead of Lasker, Tarrasch and Steinitz.

‘In Hastings I once again experienced Chigorin’s enormous strength,’ Lasker later recalled. ‘I was therefore convinced that I would inevitably have to play a match with him for the world championship.’ Alas, fate decided otherwise ...

The Ageing Lion

And so, Steinitz conceded the throne, thus becoming the first ... ex-world champion in the history of chess. The years had taken their toll. But in individual games the old lion could still show his claws, reminding everyone of his former might.

At the height of Hastings 1895, that genuine ‘tournament of the century’, the 59-year-old ex-king won a sparkling game, which received the first brilliancy prize. Up till then his opponent Curt Bardeleben had been undefeated with 7½ out of 9 (including a win against Lasker!).

Game 33

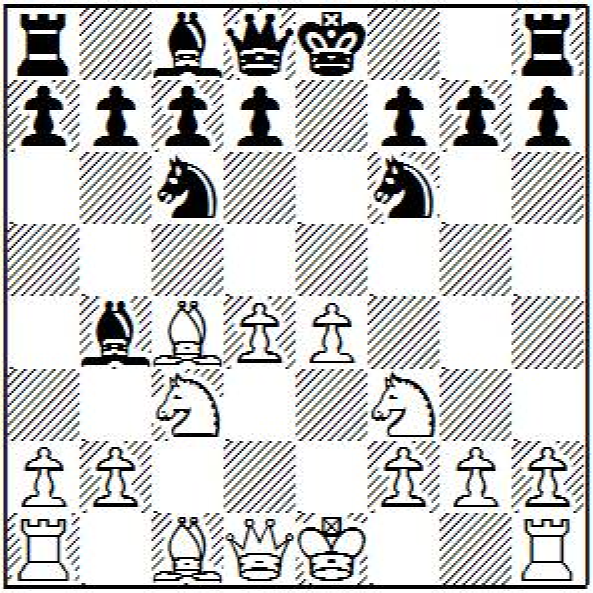
W.Steinitz-C.Bardeleben

Hastings 1895, 10th round

Giuoco Piano C54

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 Bb4+ 7 Nc3!?

Greco’s ancient gambit variation. The ‘main’ continuation 7 Bd2 Bxd2+ 8 Nbxd2 d5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Qb3 is harmless in view of 10 ... Na5! (this is simpler than 10 ... Nce7 11 0-0 0-0 12 Rfe1 c6) 11 Qa4+ Nc6 with equal chances.



7 ... d5?!

Bardeleben avoids repeating the game Steinitz-Schlechter, played at the start of the tournament, where after 7 ... Nxe4! 8 0-0 Bxc3 9 bxc3 d5 10 Ba3?! Be6? 11 Bb5 Nd6 12 Bxc6+ bxc6 13 Ne5 0-0 14 Nxc6 Qf6 Black maintained the balance with difficulty. The correct way for him was found later, in the Steinitz-Lasker return match (Moscow 3rd matchgame 1896): 10 ... dxc4! 11 Re1 Be6 12 Rxe4 Qd5 13 Qe2 0-0-0 14 Ne5 Rhe8, remaining a sound pawn to the good.

I should add that in 1899 the clever Møller Attack 9 d5!? (instead of 9 bxc3) made its appearance, while exactly one hundred years later two noteworthy games on this theme were played in Fritz 6-Anand (Frankfurt rapidplay 1999):

1) 9 ... Bf6 10 Re1 Ne7 11 Rxe4 d6 12 Bg5, and here instead of 12 ... 0-0? 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 Qd2 Black should have preferred 12 ... Bxg5 13 Nxg5 h6 14 Qe2 (Black stands better after 14 Nf3 0-0 or 14 Bb5+ Bd7 15 Qe2 Bxb5! 16 Qxb5+ Qd7 17 Qe2 Kf8 Bárczay-Portisch, Hungary 1969) 15 ... hxg5 15 Re1 Be6! 16 dxe6 f6 with sharp play;

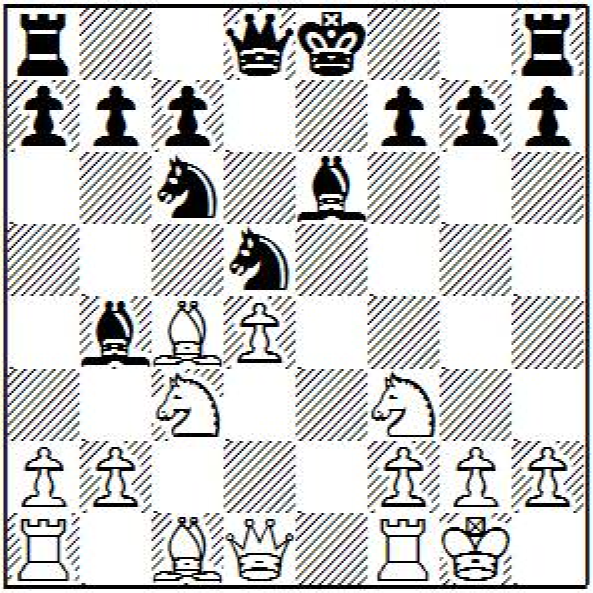
2) 9 ... Ne5! 10 bxc3 Nxc4 11 Qd4 0-0! (but not 11 ... Ncd6? 12 Qxg7 Qf6 13 Qxf6 Nxf6 14 Re1+; also not good is 11 ... f5, Schlechter-Lasker, London 1899) 12 Qxe4 Nd6 (12 ... b5!? is sharper, Djindjihashvili-Karpov, Mazatlan rapidplay 1988) 13 Qd3 b6! (this had already been played many

times) 14 Ba3 Qf6 15 Qd4 Qxd4 16 Nxd4 Bb7 17 Bxd6 cxd6 18 Nf5 g6 19 Nxd6 Bxd5, and Black converted his extra pawn. This is the modern way of combating gambits: the timely return of part of the 'booty', and it is all over ...

This opening information explains why the classical 'Italian' with 4 c3 and 5 d4 occurs so rarely nowadays.

8 exd5 Nxd5 9 0-0! Be6

White stands better after 9 ... Bxc3 10 bxc3 0-0 11 Qc2 h6 12 Re1 Be6?! 13 Bxh6! (Steinitz-Schiffers, Rostov-on-Don match 1896), or 9 ... Nb6 10 Re1+ Be7 11 Bb3 0-0 12 d5 Na5 13 Bc2 Nac4 14 Qd3 f5 15 Bb3 Nd6 16 Bf4 Nd7 17 Qe3 Rf7 18 Nd4 Nf6 19 Rad1 (Steinitz-Blackburne, Nuremberg 1896). Black also does not gain complete equality with 9 ... Nxc3 10 bxc3 Be7 (not 10 ... Bxc3? 11 Qb3! Bxa1 12 Bxf7+ Kf8 13 Ba3+ Ne7 14 Rxa1) 11 Bf4 (Bilguer).



10 Bg5 Be7?!

In the light of what follows, 10 ... Qd7 is better, for example: 11 Bxd5 Bxd5 12 Re1+ Kf8! (12 ... Be7? 13 Nxd5 Qxd5 14 Bxe7 Nxe7 15 Qe2 Qd6 16 Qb5+) 13 Re3 Bxc3 (or 13 ... f6 14 Nxd5 Qxd5 15 Bf4) 14 bxc3 f6 15 Bf4 Re8 16 Nd2 with a slight advantage to White.

11 Bxd5! Bxd5 12 Nxd5

If 12 Bxe7 Nxe7 13 Re1 0-0 14 Rxe7, then 14 ... Bxf3! 15 Qe1 Bc6 16 Qe5 Re8 with equal chances.

12 ... Qxd5 13 Bxe7 Nxe7

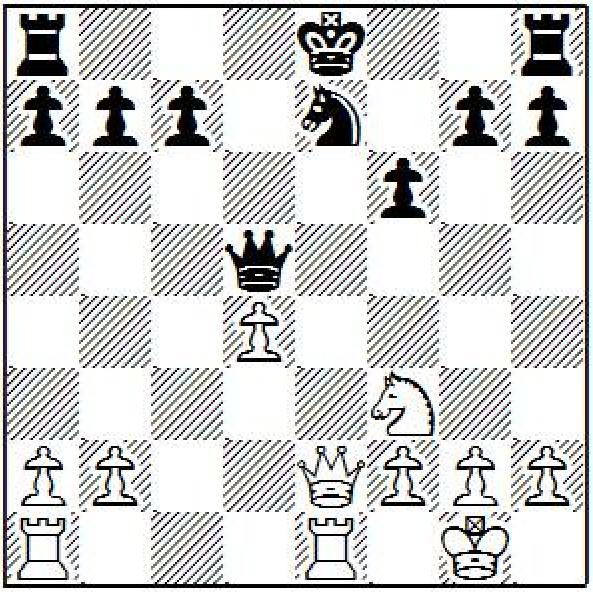
After 13 ... Kxe7 White retains a clear advantage by 14 Rc1 Rhe8 (14 ... Kd7 15 Qa4!) 15 Rc5 Qd6 (15 ... Qxa2 16 Qc2 Kd6 17 Rb5) 16 Qc2, although in Weiss-Seibold (correspondence 1933) he was successful with 14 Re1+ Kf8 15 Qe2 f6 16 Rac1 Rc8? (16 ... Kf7!?) 17 Rc5 Qd6 18 Qc4 (18 Qb5!?) 18 ... Nd8 19 Rd5 Qc6 20 Qe2! Nf7 21 Qe7+ Kg8 22 Rd7 Qc4 23 d5!

14 Re1 f6

The critical position of the opening variation.

15 Qe2?!

An imperceptible ‘scratch on a sparkling diamond’. For nearly a whole century commentators looked for a more efficient way of attacking. In 1978 Igor Zaitsev suggested 15 Qa4+!, but after 15 ... Kf7 (15 ... c6? or 15 ... Qd7 – 16 Qb4!, while if 15 ... Kd8?! there is a choice between 16 Re2, 16 Nd2 and 16 Qb4 Re8 17 Rac1) he came to a standstill: 16 Rac1 Qd6! 17 Qb3+ Nd5 or 16 Qb4 Rhe8 17 Rac1 a5! 18 Qa3 Nc6 etc. And only in 1983 did Geller discover 16 Ne5+! fxe5 (16 ... Kf8 17 Nd3! with the threat of Nf4, while if 17 ... g5, then 18 Rac1 c6 19 Qa3 wins) 17 Rxe5 Qd6 18 Qc4+! Kf8 19 Rae1 Ng8 (19 ... Ng6? 20 Rf5+ and 19 ... Re8 20 R1e4 g6 21 Re6! are both winning for White) 20 Rd5 Qc6 21 Qb4+! Kf7 22 Rc5 Qd6 23 Qc4+ Kf8 24 Rxc7 and wins.



15 ... Qd7

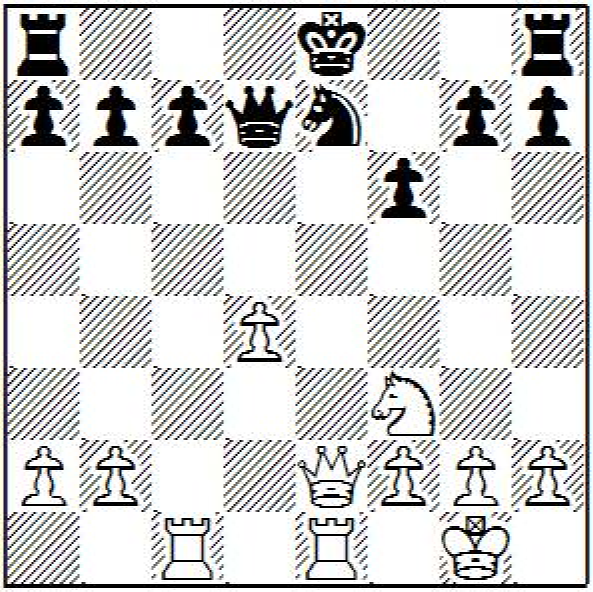
But not 15 ... Qd6? in view of 16 Qb5+ Qc6 17 Qb4 Qd6 18 Qxb7.

16 Rac1

Here Keres suggested 16 Qe4 c6 17 Re2 Kf7 18 Rae1 Nd5 19 Qh4 with some pressure, and Romanovsky – 16 d5 Kf7 17 Rad1 Rad8 (17 ... Rhd8!?) 18 Qe6+! (18 Nd4 Nxd5) 18 ... Qxe6 19 dxe6+ Kg6 20 Nh4+ Kh5 21 Rd7 Nd5 22 Rxd8! (22 Nf5 Rxd7 23 exd7 Rd8 24 Nxg7+ Kh6! is equal) 22 ... Rxd8 23 Nf5 Kg6 24 g4 with an extra pawn, but there is still the question of whether it is enough for a win.

16 Rad1!? also looks logical. Now, according to analysis by Zaitsev, bad are both 16 ... Kf7 (16 ... Kd8 17 d5) 17 Qc4+ Kf8 (17 ... Nd5? 18 Ne5+! fxe5 19 dxe5 and wins) 18 d5 with a great advantage, and 16 ... Rd8 17 Qc4 c6 (17 ... Kf8 18 Qb4 c6 19 d5! cxd5 20 Nd4 Kf7 21 Ne6 Rde8 22 Qg4 Nf5 23 Nxg7 wins) 18 Rd3 Kf8 19 Ng5! fxg5 20 Rf3+ Nf5 21 g4 g6 22 gxf5 gxf5 23 Qc5+ etc. However, after 16 ... Kf8! 17 d5!? (17 Qc4 Nd5! 18 Nd2 Kf7 19 Ne4 Rhe8 and 18 Re2 c6 19 Rde1 Kf7 are both equal) 17 ... Nxd5 18 Ng5! Re8 (inferior is 18 ... fxg5 19 Qf3+ Qf7 20 Qxd5 or 18 ... c6 19 Ne6+ Kg8 20 Nf4 Rd8 21 Qh5 Qf7 22 Qf3) 19 Qf3 c6 20 Qa3+ Kg8 21 Ne4 (21 Qh3 Qc8!) 21 ... b6 22 b4! White has no more than the initiative for the pawn. True, Black has to play very accurately: for example, 22 ...

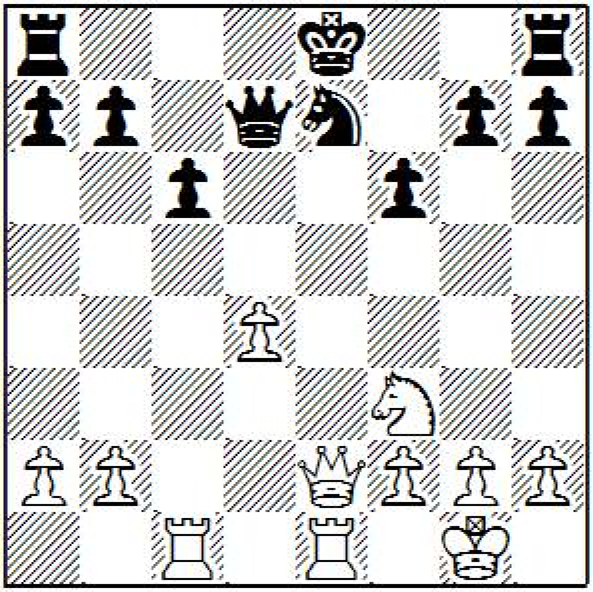
f5? is bad on account of 23 Ng5 Rxe1+ 24 Rxe1 g6 (24 ... h6? 25 Qxa7 wins) 25 b5!



16 ... c6?

16 ... Kf7! was essential, not fearing the exchange sacrifice 17 Qxe7+?! Qxe7 18 Rxe7+ Kxe7 19 Rxc7+ in view of 19 ... Kd6 20 Rxg7 (even worse is 20 Rxb7? Rhb8 21 Rxg7 Rxb2 22 h3 Rxa2 23 Rxh7 a5! etc.) 20 ... Rac8! 21 g3 Rc7, when Black has a good endgame. And if 17 Qc4+ there is (in contrast to the variation with 16 Rad1) the reply 17 ... Nd5. The immediate knight sacrifice also gives nothing real: 17 Ne5+ fxe5 18 dxe5 Qe6 19 Rxc7 Rhd8! 20 Rxb7 Kg8 or 17 Ng5+ fxg5 18 Qf3+ Nf5! 19 g4 Rhe8 (Neishtadt).

I have tried to find an advantage after 17 Nd2, but without success: 17 ... c6 18 Ne4 b6! (restricting the knight) 19 Qc4+ Kg6! 20 Qd3 (or 20 Rc3 Nf5) 20 ... Kf7 21 Qb3+ Nd5 22 Nc3 Rac8 is level.

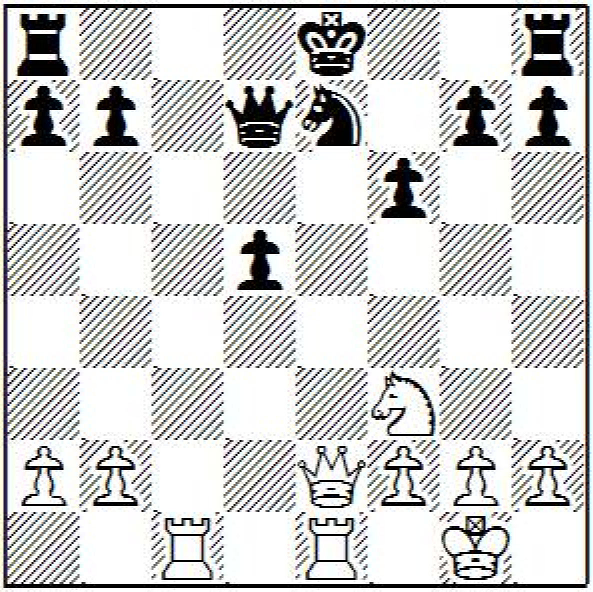


17 d5!!

A classic breakthrough in the centre, strictly in accordance with Steinitz's own theory: the player holding an advantage is obliged to attack! Especially if this wins by force ...

17 ... cxd5

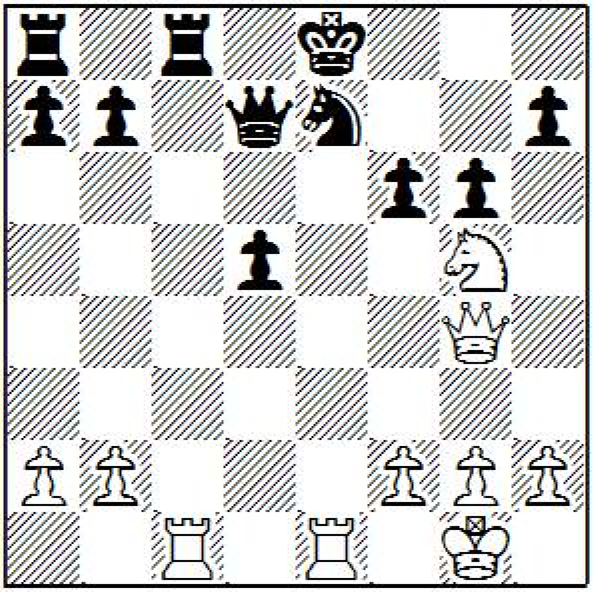
Fortunately for chess, Bardeleben had no suspicion of Steinitz's brilliant idea, otherwise he would surely have played 17 ... Kf7. However, even here after 18 dxc6 bxc6 (18 ... Nxc6 19 Rcd1) 19 Red1 (19 Qc4+ Qd5 20 Qxd5+ cxd5 21 Rc7 Rhe8 22 Nd4 is also unpleasant) the computer everywhere indicates 'winning for White': 19 ... Qe6 20 Qxe6+ Kxe6 21 Nd4+ Kf7 22 Nxc6 etc. or 19 ... Nd5 20 Nd4 Rac8 21 Qc4 with the unavoidable Nxc6 (for example, 21 ... Qg4 22 h3 Qf4 23 g3 Qe4 24 Re1 Qg6 25 Nxc6).



18 Nd4 Kf7 19 Ne6 (with the threat of Rc7) **19 ... Rhc8**

Black also fails to save the game by 19 ... Rac8 20 Qg4 g6 21 Ng5+ Ke8 22 Rxc8+ or 19 ... Nc6 20 Nc5! Qf5 (20 ... Qc8 21 Qh5+) 21 Nxb7 Qd7 22 Nc5 Qf5 23 Ne6 Rac8 24 Qa6 Ne7 25 Rxc8 Rxc8 26 h3 Rc4 27 f3!

20 Qg4! g6 21 Ng5+ Ke8

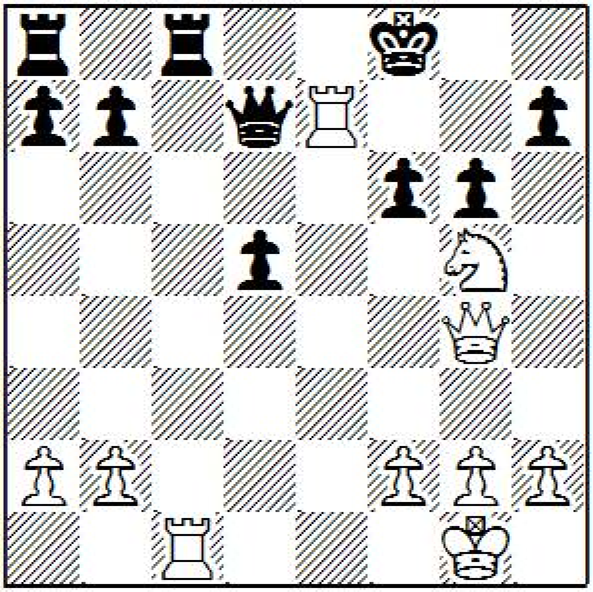


22 Rxe7+!

An astounding combination!

22 ... Kf8!

After 22 ... Kxe7 Steinitz calculated the variation 23 Re1+ Kd6 (23 ... Kd8 24 Ne6+ Ke7 25 Nc5+) 24 Qb4+ Kc7 25 Ne6+ (or 25 Rc1+) 25 ... Kb8 26 Qf4+ Rc7 27 Nxc7 Qxc7 28 Re8 mate, but the computer shows that 23 Qb4+ would have won more quickly: 23 ... Ke8 24 Re1+ Kd8 25 Ne6+ or 23 ... Qd6 24 Qxb7+ Qd7 25 Re1+ Kd6 26 Nf7+.

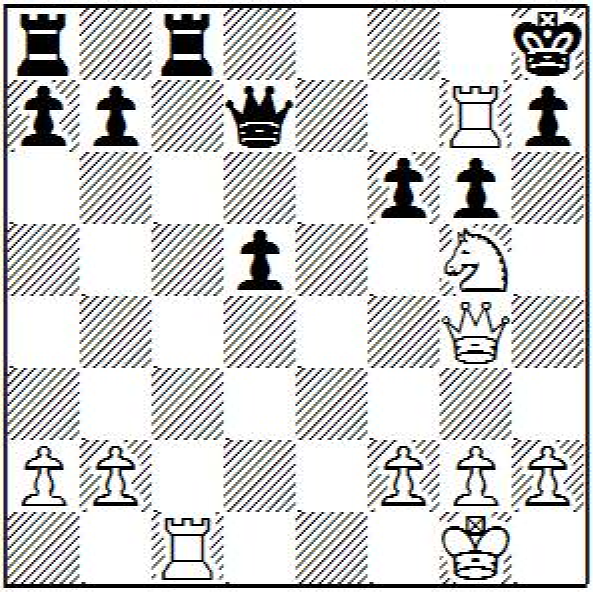


23 Rf7+!

Of course, not 23 Qxd7?? Rxc1+ and not 23 Rxc8+? – why, we will see in the note to White’s 25th move.

23 ... Kg8! (23 ... Qxf7 24 Rxc8+ Rxc8 25 Qxc8+ Qe8 26 Nxh7+ is hopeless for Black) **24 Rg7+! Kh8!**

Avoiding 24 ... Kf8 25 Nxh7+! Kxg7 26 Qxd7+.



25 Rxh7+! 1-0

The final point! More precisely, Bardeleben ... suddenly stood up and silently walked out of the room (later he sent a note by special delivery tendering his resignation).

But Steinitz willingly demonstrated to the spectators that which awaited Black: 25 ... Kg8 26 Rg7+! Kh8 27 Qh4+ Kxg7 28 Qh7+ Kf8 29 Qh8+ Ke7 30 Qg7+ Ke8 (30 ... Kd8 31 Qf8+ Qe8 32 Nf7+ and 33 Qd6 mate; 30 ... Kd6 31 Qxf6+, and the rook at c1 prevents the king from escaping onto the c-file) 31 Qg8+! Ke7 32 Qf7+ Kd8 33 Qf8+ Qe8 34 Nf7+ Kd7 35 Qd6 mate.

Here I can’t help but recall the elevated words of Hannak, the biographer of the first world champion: ‘This was Steinitz’s final flash of a dream about his former youth, brilliance, greatness and happiness, when towards the end of a hot day on 17 August 1895 he won the most brilliant game of his life.’

Hastings 1895 designated the five strongest players in the world: 1. Pillsbury – 16½ out of 21 (the sensation of the tournament!); 2. Chigorin – 16; 3. Lasker – 15½; 4. Tarrasch – 14; 5. Steinitz – 13. But which of these was No.1? For a short time a kind of ‘chess republic’ was established.

Soon in St Petersburg (1895/96) a six-cycle match-tournament of the four giants was held (alas, Tarrasch declined to play), ending in an unequivocal triumph for Lasker. And yet in one of the games the young champion suffered a bitter disappointment.

Game 34

W.Steinitz-Em.Lasker

St Petersburg 1895/96, 4th cycle

Queen's Gambit D35

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bf4

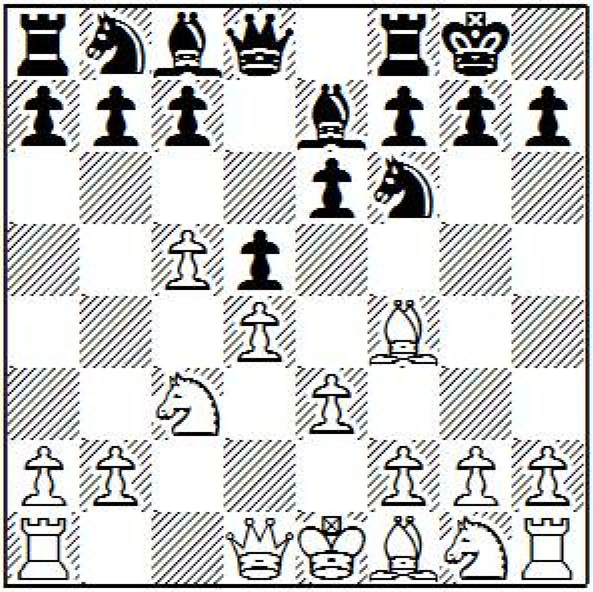
If White does not play 4 Bg5 (Steinitz-Anderssen, Vienna 1873) or 4 cxd5, he more often first goes 4 Nf3 and only after 4 ... Be7 – 5 Bf4 0-0 6 e3, for example: 6 ... c5! 7 dxc5! etc. (Steinitz-Burn, Hastings 1895).

4 ... Be7

More energetic is 4 ... c5!, as Lasker played in the sixth cycle of the St Petersburg Match-Tournament: after 5 e3 (5 Nb5?! cxd4!) 5 ... Nc6 (also good is 5 ... cxd4 6 exd4 dxc4 7 Bxc4 Nc6 8 Nf3 Be7 with equality Zukertort-Steinitz, USA 13th matchgame 1886) 6 Nf3 a6 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 cxd5 Nxd5 9 Nxd5 exd5 10 Bd3 Bb4+ Black has a good game.

5 e3 0-0 6 c5!?

In the second cycle 6 Rc1 c5 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 cxd5 exd5 9 Nf3 Nc6 10 Bd3 d4 11 exd4 Nxd4 with a level game was tried.



6 ... Ne4?!

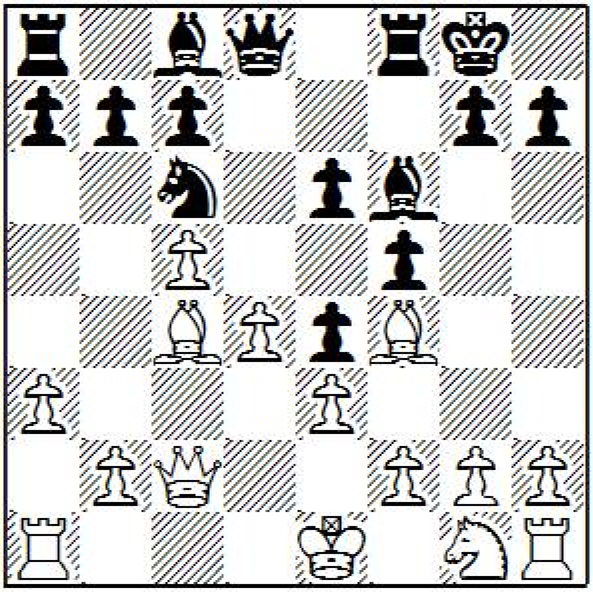
Even the great Lasker underestimated the danger of the bind on Black's queenside: the attempt to gain counterplay in the centre proves advantageous to his opponent.

The correct way for Black was only found nearly a century later: 6 ... b6! 7 b4 a5 8 a3 axb4 9 axb4 Rxa1 10 Qxa1 Nc6 11 Qa4 bxc5!! 12 Qxc6? (12 bxc5 Bd7 13 Bb5 Qa8 is equal) 12 ... cxd4! 13 Na2 (or 13 exd4 Bxb4 with a powerful initiative) 13 ... Bd7 14 Qa6 dxe3 15 fxe3 c6 16 Ne2 Ne4 17 Ng3 Nd6 18 Bd3 Qa8 19 Qxa8 Rxa8 20 Nc3 Ne8 with a great advantage (Lerner-Geller, 52nd USSR Championship, Riga 1985).

7 Nxe4! (but not 7 Bd3?! Nxc3 8 bxc3 b6! equalising) **7 ... dxe4 8 Qc2 f5 9 Bc4**

The weakness of the e6-pawn is exposed.

9 ... Nc6 10 a3 (preventing ... Nb4-d5 and vacating the a2-square for the bishop in the event of ... Nc6-a5) **10 ... Bf6**



11 0-0-0!

A concrete decision: realising that a pawn offensive on the queenside will be countered by ... e6-e5, Steinitz changes plan. Now White intends to attack the weakened enemy centre (f2-f3!), and potentially also the kingside.

11 ... Kh8

‘This and the next move prepare ... e6-e5: only in this way is it possible to undertake anything against f2-f3.’ (Romanovsky). And indeed, 11 ... Ne7 (11 ... b6? 12 d5!) 12 f3! Nd5?! 13 fxe4 Nxf4 14 exf4 is unfavourable for Black.

12 f3 Qe7?!

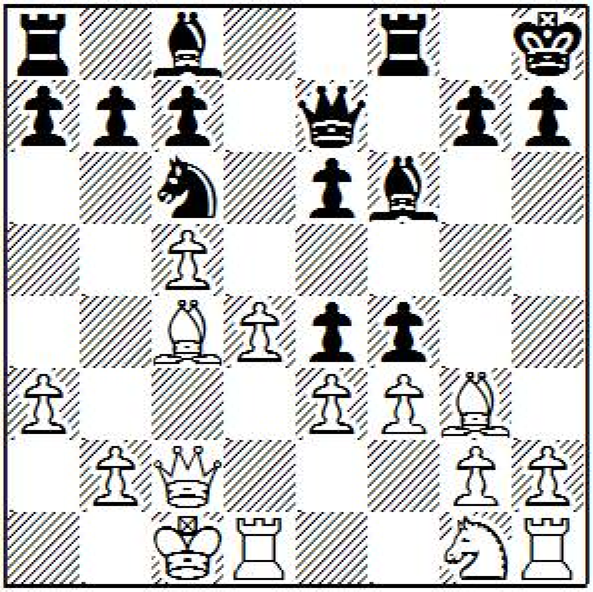
Black hurries to play ... e6-e5, not being satisfied with 12 ... exf3 13 Nxf3 Qe7.

13 Bg3!

The acceptance of the pawn sacrifice – 13 fxe4? would have handed the initiative to Black: 13 ... e5! 14 d5 exf4 15 dxc6 Qxc5 or 14 dxe5 Nxe5.

13 ... f4?!

Very typical of Lasker: on getting into dubious positions, he would launch into a mass of complications – and in this way he won numerous interesting, fighting games. But that day Steinitz was irresistible!



14 Qxe4!!

A surprise: a pretty, purely positional piece sacrifice. Black’s calculation was based on the ‘natural’ 14 Bxf4? e5 15 dxe5 Nxe5 16 Qxe4? Bf5! 17 Qxf5 Nxc4 winning.

14 ... fxg3 15 hxg3

White has only two pawns for the bishop, but his initiative is inextinguishable.

15 ... g6?!

Lasker gives up a third pawn, hoping to use the g-file for defence. If 15 ... h6, then 16 Bd3 or 16 f4 Bd7 17 Nf3 and g3-g4. 15 ... g5 suggested itself, when Steinitz said that he was intending 16 f4 g4 17 Ne2 Bd7 18 Qc2 followed by e3-e4-e5, and if possible the doubling of rooks on the h-file. It would not have been easy for Black to withstand the mounting pressure.

16 Qxg6 Bd7

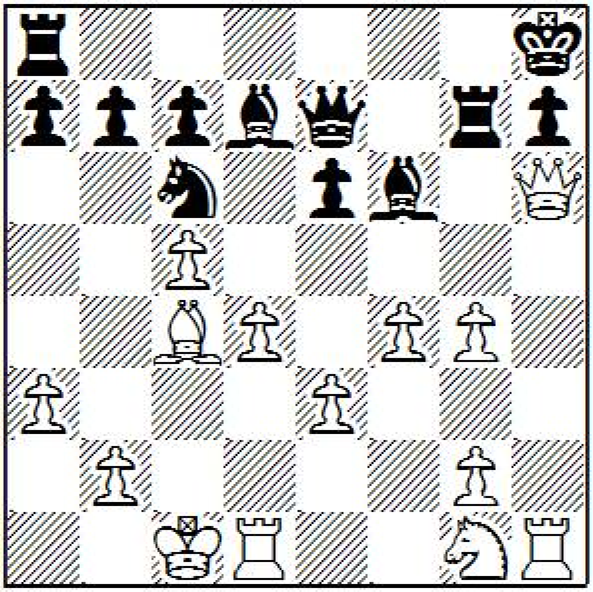
16 ... e5? 17 d5! is bad for Black, while the greedy 16 ... Rg8 17 Qe4 Rxg3?! would merely have helped the white knight join the attack: 18 Ne2 Rg7 19 Nf4.

17 f4 Rf7?

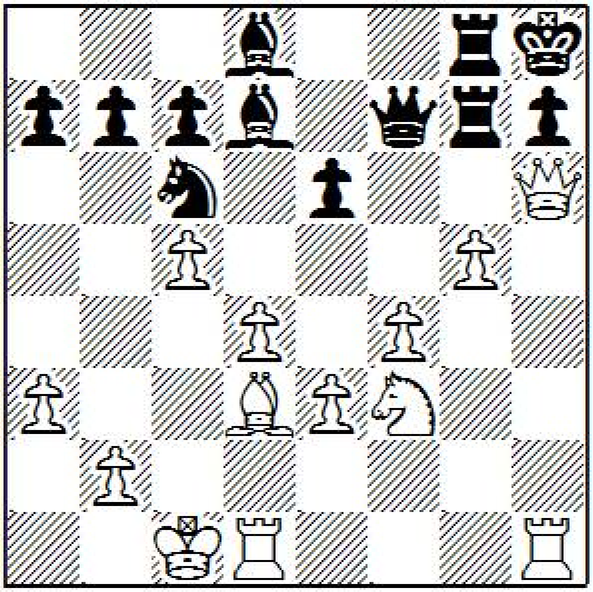
Now Black is doomed. 17 ... Rg8 was more tenacious, although after 18 Qe4 Rxg3 19 Ne2 Rg7 20 Rh6 and Rdh1 White’s pressure would have remained highly unpleasant.

18 g4 Rg7 (if 18 ... Rg8, then 19 Qh5 and g4-g5) **19 Qh6!**

The inaccurate 19 Qh5? would have allowed Black to defend by ... Be8-g6.



19 ... Rxg4 20 Bd3 Rg7 (also bad is 20 ... Rh4 21 Rxh4 Bxh4 22 Nf3 Bf2 23 Rh1 Be3 24 Kb1) **21 Nf3 Qf7 22 g4!** (the attack develops of its own accord) **22 ... Rag8 23 g5 Bd8**



24 Rh2!

This is far stronger than 24 g6?! Rxg6! After Rdh1 a catastrophe on h7 is unavoidable.

24 ... Rg6 25 Qh5! R6g7 26 Rdh1! Qxh5 27 Rxh5 Rf8 28 Rxh7+ Rxh7

If 28 ... Kg8, then 29 Rxg7+ Kxg7 30 Rh7+.

29 Rxh7+ Kg8 30 Rxd7 Rf7 31 Bc4! 1-0

Just before the curtain – a little ‘stroke of genius’: Black resigned in view of 31 ... Rxd7 32 Bxe6+ Rf7 33 g6.

The fighting spirit and energy demonstrated by Steinitz, who was only half well and already a long way from his best days, both in this game and throughout the St Petersburg match-tournament, provoke enormous admiration.

A year later in Moscow (1896/97) the former champion lost to Lasker in the first return match in history, beginning with four successive defeats. This, however, did not prevent him from writing and sending a congratulatory letter to his long-standing opponent Chigorin, who had just won the international tournament in Budapest:

‘My dear friend and deeply-respected colleague! Please accept my most hearty congratulations regarding your glorious victory in Budapest. Admirers of our noble art will be sincerely gladdened by the fact that the winner was a representative of Russia, which in recent times has done so much for chess, thanks mainly to your genius and authority.

Allow me to assure you, on behalf of all the chessplayers I know, that I wish you the greatest success in the future.

With best wishes, W. Steinitz.’

I somehow don’t recall such letters in the severe 20th century ... And this for all the difficult, unsociable, even quarrelsome character of the first champion! ‘He had arguments wherever he settled,’ writes Znosko-Borovsky. ‘Cheerful, pleasant and witty though he was on short visits, a lover of cheerful anecdotes, capable of citing lengthy verses which he had never learned by heart, but only read a couple of times, an admirer of Wagner’s music, to which he could listen for hours – he was a difficult person in the place where he settled. He did, said and wrote what he considered necessary or correct, completely ignoring the repercussions that would result, or the response it would provoke. Within a few years of arriving in America he could hardly find a town that was willing to invite him to give a simultaneous display. This is understandable: one of his first actions in American was to subject Morphy, the American genius, to a destructive criticism.’

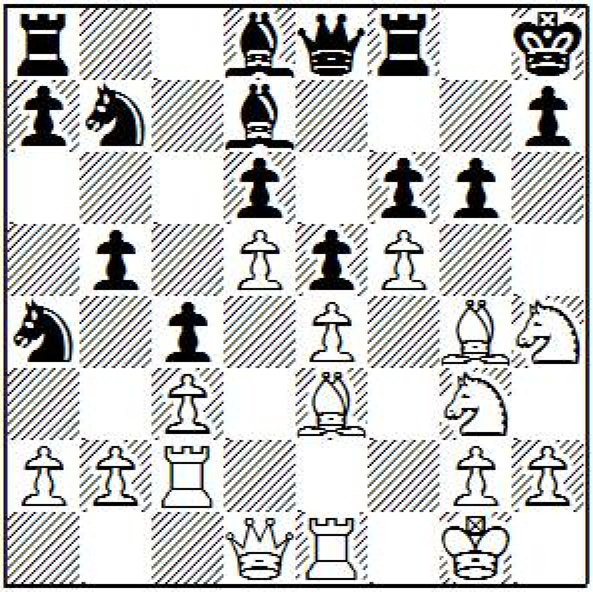
During the Moscow return match Steinitz began to experience serious health problems – later he even spent almost a whole month in a clinic. But even in such very difficult conditions, playing a young and very strong opponent, the old maestro was sometimes able to create genuine strategic masterpieces.

Game 35

Em.Lasker-W.Steinitz

Return match,

Moscow 1896/97, 8th game



23 ... g5!

Delaying White’s attack and intending the long-planned invasion of a knight at d3. The immediate 23 ... Nbc5? is bad in view of 24 fxg6 hxg6 25 Bxd7 Nxd7 26 Qg4 Rg8 27 Nhf5! winning.

24 Nf3 Nbc5 25 h4!?

‘Opening lines to strengthen the attack. After 25 Ree2 Nd3 White would have had to counter the possible combination 26 ... Ndxb2 27 Rxb2 Nxc3, for example: 26 Red2 Ba5 27 Bh5 Qe7 28 Ne2 (defending the c3-pawn in the event of ... Nxb2) or 26 Qa1 Ba5 27 b4 Bb6 28 Bxb6 Nxb6 29 Ne1 Nf4 and 30 ... a5, in both variations with a difficult game for White.’ (Euwe)

25 ... gxh4 26 Nxh4 Nd3 27 Rf1

A practically forced pawn sacrifice. If 27 Ree2, then strong is 27 ... Rg8! (27 ... Ndxb2 28 Rxb2 Nxc3 is not so clear) 28 Bh5 (28 Red2 Bb6) 28 ... Qf8 29 Nf1 Bb6! 30 Bxb6 axb6 followed by ... Qh6 or ... Nf4.

27 ... Naxb2 (27 ... Rg8?! 28 b4) **28 Qf3 Bb6 29 Kh2 Rg8!?**

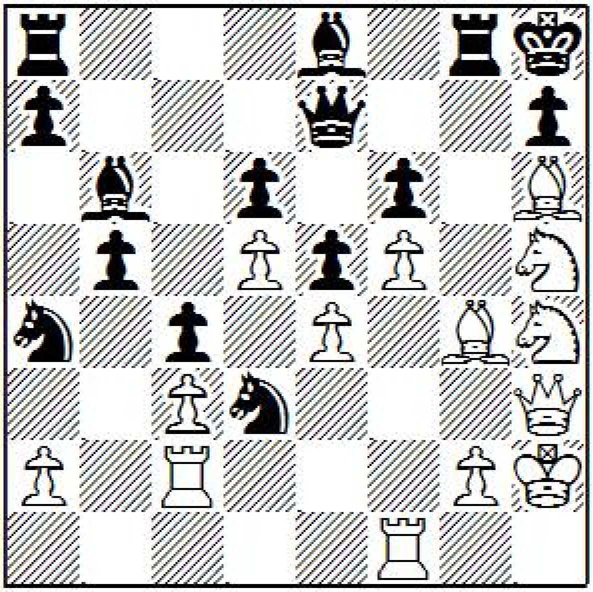
‘Black could have exchanged bishops (29 ... Bxe3), but he does not hurry with his exchange, since after the bishop moves from e3 his bishop at b6 will prevent the attacking manoeuvre Rh1 and Kg1.’ (Euwe)

30 Bh6 Qe7 31 Nh5 (apparently, preparing a combination ...) **31 ... Be8!**

A highly important link in the defence!

32 Qh3 (or 32 Ng3 Na4 33 Bh5 Ba5 34 Ne2 Nac5 etc.) **32 ... Na4**

A highly picturesque position has arisen: where else have you seen so many pieces on the h-file?!



33 Bf3?!

Retreat! Many commentators were puzzled why Lasker did not play 33 Ng6+!? The computer solves this problem in a matter of minutes: 33 ... Bxg6! (of course, not 33 ... hxg6? 34 Nxf6! Rg7 35 Bxg7+ Kxg7 36 Qh7+ Kxf6 37 fxg6+ Nf4 38 Qh4+) 34 fxg6 Rxg6 35 Nxf6 (35 Rxf6? Rxf6 36 Bg5 Nf4!) 35 ... Rxf6! 36 Bg5 Raf8 (more modest is 36 ... Rxf1 37 Bxe7 Bg1+ 38 Kh1 – 38 Kg3?! Rg8! – 38 ... Bf2+ with perpetual check) 37 Rxf6 Rxf6 38 Bf5 Kg8 39 Qh4 (or immediately 39 Bxf6 Qxf6 40 Qxh7+ Kf8) 39 ... Bd8 40 Bxf6 Qxf6 41 Qxh7+ Kf8, and together with the extra material Black retains winning chances.

33 ... Nac5 (33 ... Ba5!?) **34 Re2**

And again Lasker rejects 34 Ng6+!? Bxg6 35 fxg6, possibly not seeing anything good for himself after 35 ... Rxg6 36 Ng3 Rag8 37 Nf5 Qd7 38 Bh5 Nxe4! 39 Bxg6 Rxg6 40 Be3 Ba5.

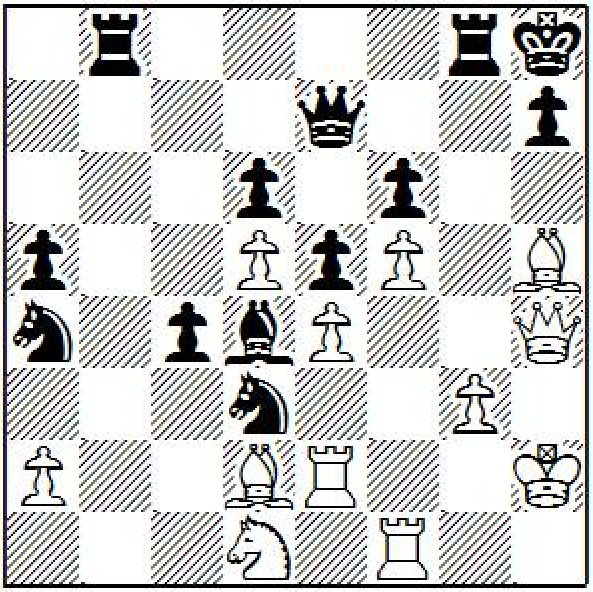
34 ... Nd7 (34 ... Ba5 wins) **35 g3 a5** (now things become very bad for White) **36 Ng2 b4 37 Ne3 Rc8**

Simpler was 37 ... Bxe3 winning.

38 Nd1 (38 cxb4 axb4 39 Rc2 c3! etc.) **38 ... bxc3**

‘38 ... b3 and ... N7c5 was even stronger.’ (Euwe)

39 Nxc3 Bd4 40 Bd2 (40 Nd1 Bf7) **40 ... N7c5** (40 ... Rb8!?) **41 Qh4 Bxh5 42 Bxh5 Rb8 43 Nd1 Na4**



With the threat of ... c4-c3. 43 ... Rb1!? was also good.

44 Bxa5 Ra8 45 Bd2

Or 45 Be1 Nxe1 46 Rfxe1 c3 47 Rc2 Nb2 48 Nxc3?! Rgc8 49 Rxb2 (49 Rec1? Nd3) 49 ... Bxc3 50 Ree2 Bxb2 51 Rxb2 Rcb8 52 Rc2 Rb4 and Black wins.

45 ... c3 46 Bxc3!?

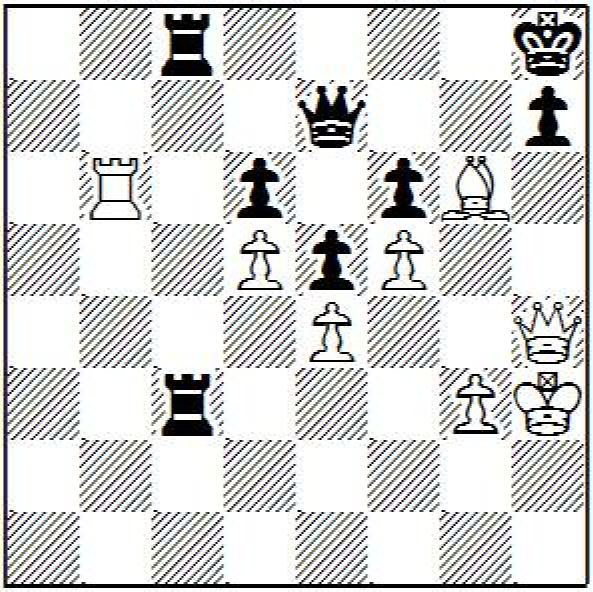
A desperate chance. If 46 Bh6 Black has a pleasant choice between 46 ... Nab2 47 Ne3 Bxe3 48 Bxe3 Rxa2 and 46 ... Rgc8 47 Ne3 Bxe3 48 Bxe3 c2.

46 ... Nxc3 47 Nxc3 Bxc3 48 Rf3 Nc1 49 Rc2 Nxa2 50 Rfxc3 Nxc3 51 Rxc3 Rgc8

Chigorin recommended 51 ... Rg5!? 52 Bf3 (or 52 g4 Ra2+ 53 Kh3 Qa7 54 Bg6 Ra3 55 Rxa3 Qxa3+ 56 Kg2 Qa7 and wins) 52 ... Ra2+ (52 ... Kg7!?) 53 Kh3 Kg7 54 g4 h5 55 gxh5 Qa7 56 Qe1 (56 h6+ Kh7) 56 ... Qf2 57 Qxf2 Rxf2 58 Bd1 Rf1 59 Bf3 Kh6 followed by ... Rgg1 and ... Kg5-f4.

52 Rb3!? Ra2+ 53 Kh3 Rac2 (53 ... Ra1 wins, but not 53 ... Rcc2?! 54 Rb8+ Kg7 55 Be2! with a draw) **54 Rb6** (a last attempt to confuse matters) **54 ... R2c3 55 Bg6**

With the threat of Rxd6.



55 ... Rd8?

The result of fatigue: Black would have won easily by both 55 ... R3c7 and 55 ... Rc1! 56 Kg2 R8c2+ 57 Kf3 Rc3+ 58 Kg4 Rc4 59 Rb8+ Rc8.

56 Rb7! ½-½

A draw was agreed in view of 56 ... Qxb7 (56 ... Rc7? 57 Rxc7 Qxc7 58 Qxf6+ Kg8 59 Bf7+!) 57 Qxf6+ Qg7 (57 ... Kg8? 58 Qxd8+ Kg7 59 Bh5!? Rc8 60 f6+ Kh6 61 Qxd6 etc.) 58 Qxd8+ Qg8 59 Qf6+ with perpetual check.

At the return match Steinitz more than worthily explained his bad play in the press: ‘Why am I losing so ignominiously? Mainly because Lasker is the greatest player that I have ever met, perhaps the best of all who have ever existed ... I simply cannot now withstand a struggle with a top-class master. A chess player has no right to be ill, just like a commander on the battlefield.’

His last heroic deed was winning fourth prize in the Vienna 1898 marathon, but Steinitz’s powers rapidly deserted him. At the end of the century he took part in his last tournament (London 1899), and although for the first time in his career he did not win a prize, at the finish he won a game – against Janowski, which was to be the last in his life.

The great master ended his days on the very threshold of the 20th century, in poverty, in a mental asylum on Ward’s Island, not far from New York. He went there by boat, clutching to his chest a small chess board; he imagined that he produced an electric current, moving his pieces and striking down his opponents. He longed to play both with Lasker, and with God Himself – and he was sure that he would win ...

A fitting inscription on his gravestone would have been the words of Chigorin: ‘This was undoubtedly a chess genius, one of the greatest who has ever lived. And, which I respect in him most of all, he rated chess highly as an art. The struggle with him at the chess board forced me to endure both minutes of intense pleasure, and periods of despondency.’

In his declining years Steinitz once said about himself: ‘I am not a chess historian – I myself am a piece of chess history, which no one can avoid. I will not write about myself, but I am sure that someone will write ... ’ They did indeed write about him, many did. The most prominent proponents of his ideas were Tarrasch, Lasker and, somewhat later, Euwe. From his school there emerged Pillsbury, Schlechter, Maróczy, Rubinstein, Capablanca ... And Alekhine too, by his own admission, learned more from Steinitz than from any other masters of the past.

Of course, much water has flowed under the bridge since then, and much has changed in the approach to chess. Thus, with the improvement in defensive technique it has become extremely difficult to gain an advantage without risk, and one is obliged to fight for the initiative by other, ultra-active and sometimes risky means, even at the cost of weakening one's own position, which would hardly have gladdened Steinitz. However, when defence has been brought to perfection, there is no other way.

And again I should like to conclude this chapter with some notable opinions of the chess kings.

Steinitz: 'Chess is not for the faint-hearted; it absorbs a person entirely. To get to the bottom of this game, he has to give himself up into slavery. Chess is difficult, it demands work, serious reflection and zealous research. Only honest, impartial criticism leads to the goal. Unfortunately, many regard the critic as an enemy, instead of seeing in him a guide to the truth ... '

Lasker: 'Steinitz was a thinker worthy of a seat in the halls of a University. A player, as the world believed he was, he was *not*; his studious temperament made that impossible; and thus he was conquered by a player and in the end little valued by the world, he died.'

Capablanca: 'It was Steinitz who was the first to establish the basic principles of general chess strategy. He was a pioneer and one of the most profound researchers into the truth of the game, which was hidden from his contemporaries.'

Alekhine: 'That which Steinitz gave to the theoretical aspect of the game when he was at his best is very remote to all our home-bred chess philosophers, but with his views on Morphy, whom he tries to discredit completely, it is of course impossible to agree.'

Fischer: 'Steinitz's book knowledge didn't compare with Morphy's, and – where Morphy was usually content to play a book line in the opening – Steinitz was always looking for some completely original line. He understood more about the use of squares than did Morphy, and contributed a great deal more to chess theory.'

Petrosian: 'The significance of Steinitz's teaching is that he showed that in principle chess has a strictly-defined, logical nature.'

chapter three
Emanuel the Second

The second world champion Emanuel Lasker (24 December 1868 – 11 January 1941) held the crown for longer than anyone – 27 years, and it is unlikely that this record will ever be surpassed. He was a man of broad education, a doctor of philosophy and mathematics, and an author of scientific works and books, including his famous *Manual of Chess*, and even historical philosophical dramas.

Wisdom, a mighty intellect, deep belief in himself, in his common sense, and, of course, his enormous natural gift for chess enabled Lasker to compete successfully with the strongest players in the world almost to the age of 68! Before him history knew of no such examples, and in subsequent years only the names of Smyslov and Korchnoi come to mind ...

Lasker was, along with Tarrasch, a direct follower of Steinitz's positional theory. But, while understanding amazingly deeply the laws of the chess struggle, he went further. Botvinnik expresses this well:

'It is staggering that, over such a lengthy and brilliant chess career, in general Lasker played little ... This indicates that he was not only a player, but also a chess researcher. When he was not playing, he was thinking (not all the great masters are capable of this), he prepared for tournaments and achieved success. Lasker was perhaps the first of the great masters who understood the importance of preparing for competitions; before him, of course, they studied chess, but only in general, and they were not yet able to prepare concretely (directly for a given tournament) ... Lasker's preparation was assisted by his chess universality. He did not have "tastes", he did not have a "style", he did everything equally strongly, equally well – in defence and attack, in quiet positions and wild complications, in the middlegame and the endgame. Therefore the main aim of his preparation was to study the features of his opponent's style. Lasker always endeavoured to create a situation on the board in which his opponent would feel uncertain ... He knew his opponents to perfection, their virtues and weaknesses. Lasker was a great psychologist ... '

Lasker spoke out for chess professionalism and for ‘the uniting of the chess world into an effective organisation’ (like FIDE or the GMA). He suggested giving masters the copyright on the texts of games they had played, seeing in this the material basis of professionalism; however, nowadays this idea, which has been fervently upheld by grandmaster Sveshnikov, is hardly realisable ...

Chess or Mathematics?

Lasker was born in the small town of Berlinchen, not far from the then Prussian-Russian border, into the poor family of a cantor in the local synagogue. At the age of 12, the boy, who showed unusual ability in mathematics, was sent to a school in Berlin, under the care of his elder brother Berthold – a student in the medical faculty. It was he who taught Emanuel to play chess, presented him with a chess book, and began taking him to a café where he earned a little money by playing for stakes.

The boy was so captivated by the game that his parents ordered Berthold to transfer him to another school. However (oh, Providence!) its head and mathematics teacher turned out to be ... the president and champion of the local chess club! And, fortunately, chess went hand in hand with mathematics right to the end of his schooling in 1888. Lasker entered the mathematics faculty of Berlin University and, like his elder brother, he helped to earn his living by playing for stakes (was it from this that he acquired his long-standing habit of playing every game with full intensity, as though it was the most important in his life?).

He finished his first tournament in the Kaiserhof Café with a 100% score, and soon he also won a secondary tournament at the Sixth Congress of the German Chess Union (Breslau 1889). It is curious that in the main, international tournament the winner was his future opponent (incidentally, a colleague and friend of his brother Berthold) Doctor Tarrasch, declared by the press to be ‘Anderssen’s successor’ ...

After gaining first prize and the master title, the 20-year-old Emanuel also received his first invitation to an international tournament – Amsterdam 1889: 1. Burn – 7 out of 8; 2. Lasker – 6; 3. Mason – 5½; 4. Van Vliet – 5; 5. Gunsberg – 4; 6. Bauer – 3½ etc. Here he had the good fortune to carry out a brilliant combination, which became a classic example of the destructive double bishop sacrifice.

Game 36

Em.Lasker-J.Bauer

Amsterdam 1889

Bird Opening A03

1 f4 d5 2 e3 Nf6 3 b3?! (3 Nf3! is more accurate, not allowing 3 ... d4!) **3 ... e6 4 Bb2 Be7 5 Bd3 b6** (5 ... c5 is also quite good) **6 Nf3** (6 Qe2!?) **6 ... Bb7** (6 ... Ba6!?) **7 Nc3 Nbd7 8 0-0 0-0 9 Ne2** (9 Ne5!?) **9 ... c5**

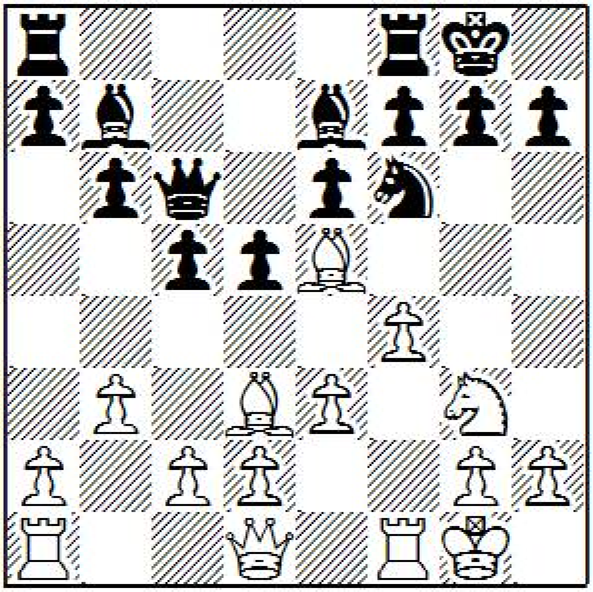
9 ... Nc5 and ... Nxd3 is evidently safer.

10 Ng3 Qc7 (10 ... Ne4!?) **11 Ne5 Nxe5**

In Zak’s opinion, better is 11 ... d4 12 exd4 cxd4 13 Bxd4 Bc5! with equal chances, but matters are not so clear after 13 Qe2! Qd6 14 Rae1 Nc5 15 f5.

12 Bxe5 Qc6

With the obvious idea of ... d5-d4.



13 Qe2!

A psychologically subtle move: both prophylactically defending g2, and threatening Bb5, which in fact is a sham – the bishop is looking in quite the opposite direction! ‘If Lasker had indeed worked out everything to the end, why then did he make his 13th move with his queen?’ writes Boris Vainstein in his book *Myslitel* (The Thinker, 1981). ‘After all, the combination would also have worked with the queen on d1 ... ’ Nothing of the sort! After 13 Nh5 d4! no win for White is apparent:

1) 14 Rf2 dxe3 (14 ... Nxh5 15 Qxh5 f5 16 exd4 Qd7 17 c3 Bf6 is also acceptable, but not 14 ... Ne8? 15 Bxg7! Bh4 16 Qg4 Bxf2+ 17 Kxf2 f5 18 Qg5 dxe3+ 19 dxe3 Rf7 20 Be5+ Kf8 21 Rd1) 15 dxe3 Nxh5 16 Bxh7+ (16 Qxh5 f5 17 Rd1 Rad8 is equal) 16 ... Kxh7 17 Qxh5+ Kg8 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 Qg4+ Kh7 20 Qh5+ Kg7 with perpetual check (but not 21 Rf3? Qxf3! 22 gxf3 Rh8 and wins);

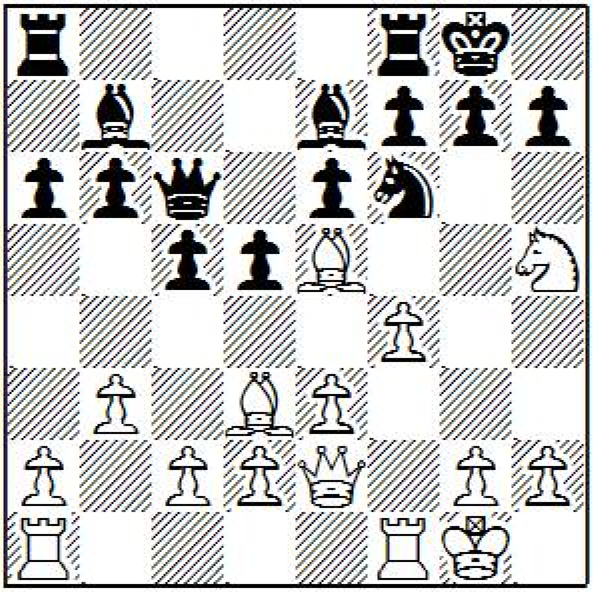
2) 14 Nxf6+ gxf6! (14 ... Bxf6 15 Qg4 Bxe5 16 fxe5 dxe3 17 dxe3 Rad8 18 Rf3 is dangerous for Black) 15 Bxh7+ (15 Qg4+ Kh8 16 Qh3 Qxg2+!) 15 ... Kxh7 (15 ... Kh8? 16 e4! fxe5 17 Qh5 Kg7 18 Rf3 wins for White) 16 Qh5+ Kg7 17 Rf3 Rg8 18 Rg3+ Kf8 19 Qh6+ Ke8 20 Rxg8+ Kd7 21 Rg4 (or 21 Rg7 fxe5 22 fxe5 Qe4 23 Rf1 Rf8) 21 ... fxe5 22 fxe5 dxe3 23 Qxe3 f5 with a double-edged game.

13 ... a6?

Bauer falls into the trap set for him, although he had a reasonable choice between 13 ... Ne4 (13 ... Rfd8?! 14 f5) 14 Nxe4 dxe4 15 Bc4 (15 Bb5 Qc8 16 Qg4 f6 17 Bb2 Bd5 is level) 15 ... f6 16 Bc3 Qd7 17 f5 Bd5 18 fxe6 Qxe6 19 Bxd5 Qxd5 20 Qg4 Rf7 and 13 ... Nd7 14 Nh5 (14 Bb2 Bf6) 14 ... f6 (not 14 ... Nxe5? 15 fxe5) 15 Bb5 Qc8 16 Qg4 Rf7 17 Bb2 a6 18 Be2 Qc6 with equal chances in each instance.

14 Nh5!

Signalling the start of a ferocious storming of the king’s fortress.



14 ... Nxh5

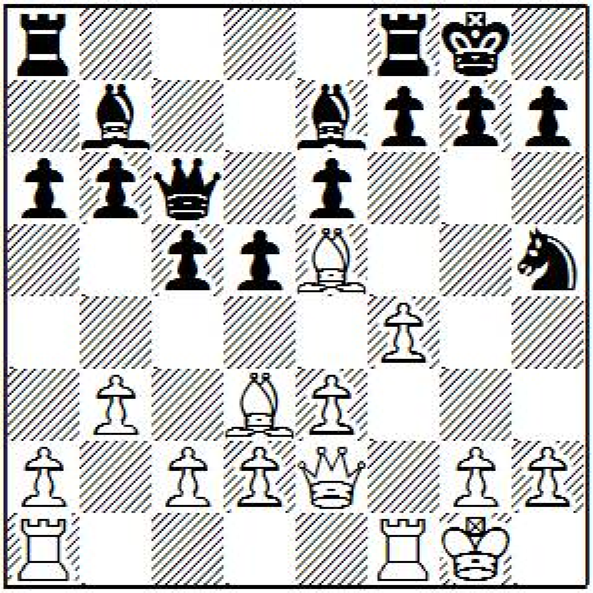
It is amazing that Black's position is already practically hopeless:

1) 14 ... d4 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Qg4 Kh8 (16 ... e5 17 Be4!) 17 Rf3 Rg8 (17 ... dxe3 18 Nxf6 gxf6 19 Qh4) 18 Bxh7! Rgd8 19 Qh3 Be7 20 Be4!;

2) 14 ... Ne8 15 Bxg7! c4 (15 ... Nxg7 16 Qg4; 15 ... f5 16 Bxf8 Bxf8 17 a4) 16 Bd4 f5 17 bxc4 dxc4 18 Bxc4 b5 19 Bb3 (Fritz);

3) 14 ... h6 15 Bxf6 (or 15 Nxg7!? Kxg7 16 Qg4+ Kh8 17 Qh4 Kg7 18 Rf3 winning) 15 ... Bxf6 16 Nxf6+ gxf6 17 Qg4+ Kh8 18 Rf3! (more accurate than 18 Qh4 Kg7 19 Rf3 Rfd8 20 Rg3+ Kf8 21 Qxh6+ Ke7) 18 ... Rg8 19 Qh4 Kg7 20 Rg3+ Kf8 21 Rxg8+ Kxg8 22 Qxh6 f5 23 Rf1;

4) 14 ... Rfd8!? (the only way of avoiding an immediate rout) 15 Nxf6+ Bxf6 (15 ... gxf6 16 Qh5 Kf8 17 Qh6+ and Bxf6 wins) 16 Bxh7+! (or 16 Bxf6 gxf6 17 Qg4+ Kf8 – but not 17 ... Kh8? 18 Qh4 f5 19 Qf6+ and Rf3 – 18 Bxh7 etc.) 16 ... Kf8 (16 ... Kxh7? 17 Qh5+ Kg8 18 Bxf6 gxf6 19 Qh6! and Rf3 winning) 17 Bxf6 gxf6, continuing to resist a pawn down.



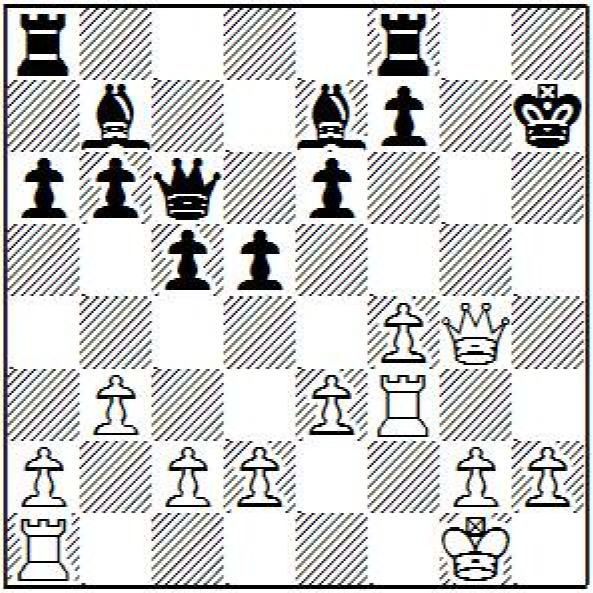
15 Bxh7+! (of course, not 15 Qxh5? f5) **15 ... Kxh7 16 Qxh5+ Kg8 17 Bxg7!!**

This double bishop sacrifice is Lasker’s patent (later, in St Petersburg 1914, Tarrasch knocked out Nimzowitsch in similar fashion – *Game No.51*). Modern computer programs find his combination with frightening speed: on the calculation of the main 15-move variation, Fritz, for example, spends not more than 13 seconds!

17 ... Kxg7

If 17 ... f5 there is a choice of winning moves between 18 Rf3 Bf6 19 Bxf6 Rxf6 20 Rh3! Kf8 21 Qg5 e5 22 Rh7 and 18 Be5 Rf6 19 Rf3 Kf8 20 Rg3, and if 17 ... f6 – between 18 Bh6 and 18 Rf3 Qe8 19 Qh8+ Kf7 20 Qh7 Qc6 21 Qh5+!

18 Qg4+ Kh7 19 Rf3



19 ... e5 20 Rh3+ Qh6 21 Rxh6+ Kxh6 (by giving up his queen Black has avoided mate, but not defeat) **22 Qd7!**

Winning a piece, and with it the game.

22 ... Bf6 23 Qxb7 Kg7 (23 ... exf4 24 Qxb6 Kg7 25 Rf1 and 23 ... Rab8 24 Qxd5 Rbd8 25 Qc6 Kg7 26 d3 both win for White) **24 Rf1 Rab8 25 Qd7**

Or 25 Qxd5 Rbd8 26 Qf3 Rxd2 27 Qg4+ Kh7 28 Qf5+ Kg7 29 fxe5.

25 ... Rfd8 (25 ... e4 26 Qxd5 Rfd8 27 Qxe4 Rxd2 28 Qc4 a5 29 Rf2 and wins) **26 Qg4+ Kf8 27 fxe5 Bg7** (27 ... Bxe5 28 Qf5) **28 e6 Rb7 29 Qg6 f6 30 Rxf6+! Bxf6 31 Qxf6+ Ke8 32 Qh8+ Ke7 33 Qg7+ Kxe6 34 Qxb7 Rd6 35 Qxa6 d4 36 exd4 cxd4 37 h4 d3 38 Qxd3 1-0**

After returning to Berlin, Lasker won a mini-match against Bardeleben (+2 -1 =1), and then crushed by a score of +5 =3 none other than Mieses, the third prize-winner at the congress in Breslau!

In 1890 he travelled to England, where he defeated Bird, Englisch and a number of other masters. Lasker’s name became known throughout Europe. A year later the future world champion again visited the shores of the misty Albion and soon, like Steinitz 30 years earlier and Zukertort – 20, he settled in London for a long time. The stakes there were higher, and there was the lure of its halo, not yet altogether lost, of the chess capital of the world ...

The Unacknowledged King

As has already been mentioned, in 1892/93 Steinitz had three real rivals for the throne: Chigorin – the participant in the two previous matches for the world championship (1889, 1892), Tarrasch – the winner of Breslau 1889, Manchester 1890 and Dresden 1892, and the improving Lasker. The successes of the latter were as yet modest, but stable: confident victories in two English tournaments in 1892, and crushing match wins over Blackburne (+6 =4) and Bird (+5 =0).

Realising that for contesting the world crown this was insufficient, Lasker challenged Tarrasch to a match. But the latter replied that he would accept the challenge, only when the 'young man' had taken first place in a strong international tournament, and he explained his refusal in the following way: 'Since in the world there are now several players whose successes are superior to Lasker's English victories, I would have been unfair to them. If Lasker wanted to test his strength, he should not have avoided participating in the Dresden tournament ... '

And for the moment Tarrasch decided to play a match with Chigorin. But their clash in the autumn in St Petersburg did not produce a winner: +9 -9 =4 (this match was described on p.89).

But what was the spurned Lasker, with his ambitions, to do? There were no big tournaments in prospect, and at the end of 1892 he set off on a long tour of America, where he won matches against Schowalter (+6 -2 =2) and other American and Cuban masters, and then in the autumn of 1893 took first prize at a tournament in New York, scoring 13 out of 13 (4½ points ahead of Albin and 6 ahead of the young Pillsbury, the future victor in Hastings). This already made an impression. Still before that, in August, when Tarrasch and Chigorin were still only preparing for their candidates match, Lasker sent a challenge to Steinitz without delay. And the elderly world champion, who earlier had called the match with Chigorin 'his last', accepted the challenge, since he never avoided a fight!

The Steinitz-Lasker match took place from 15 March to 26 May 1894 in New York, Philadelphia and Montreal. They played, as was now the custom, to the first to win 10 games, with a time control of two hours for the first 30 moves and then one hour for every 15. The prize for the winner was $2,250, and $750 for the loser. In the event of the champion losing, he had the right to a return match.

The start of the match was genuinely intriguing and bloody. In the first game Lasker outwitted his opponent ‘Bronstein-style’, but Steinitz gained spectacular revenge in the second. Then the two players again exchanged heavy blows and followed up with two fighting draws (where in both cases Steinitz was a pawn up). After six games the scores were level – 3-3, and the turning point became the tremendously intense and dramatic seventh game.

Game 37

Em.Lasker-W.Steinitz

World Championship, USA/Canada 1894, 7th game

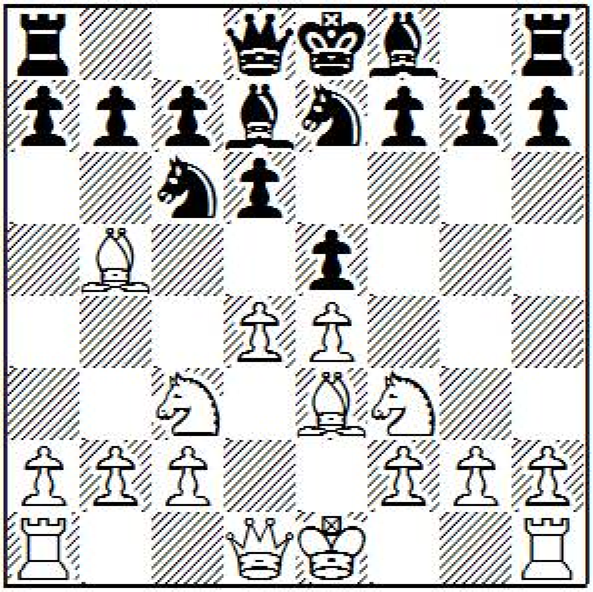
Ruy Lopez C62

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 d6 4 d4 Bd7 5 Nc3 Nge7

Steinitz’s classical defence.

6 Be3

Before this Lasker played 6 Bc4, but in the fifth game after 6 ... exd4 7 Nxd4 Nxd4 8 Qxd4 Nc6 9 Qe3 Be6 (Black fails to equalise by 9 ... Ne5 10 Bb3 c6 11 Qg3 or 10 ... Be6 11 f4 Nc4 12 Qg3, as in the first and third games; 9 ... Be7!?) 10 Nd5 Be7 11 Bd2 0-0 12 0-0 Ne5 13 Bb3 Bxd5 14 Bxd5 c6 15 Bb3 Nd7 16 Rad1 a5 17 c3 a4 18 Bc2 Re8 19 Qh3 Nf8 20 Be3 Qa5 Black obtained a solid enough position.

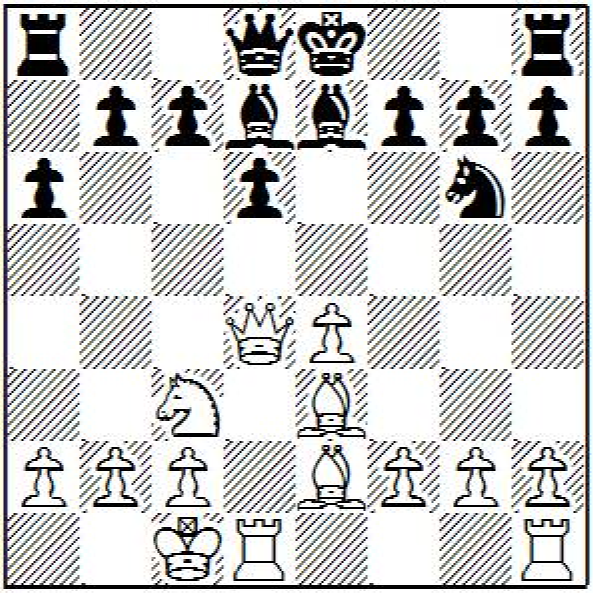


6 ... Ng6 7 Qd2 Be7 8 0-0-0 (8 0-0 0-0 9 Rad1 is quieter) **8 ... a6 9 Be2 exd4!**

If 9 ... 0-0?!, then 10 dxe5! is unpleasant, for example: 10 ... Ngxe5 11 Nxe5 Nxe5 12 f4 with the initiative.

10 Nxd4 Nxd4 11 Qxd4

‘Not allowing the exchange of bishops after 11 Bxd4 Bg5!’ (Zak). True, 12 Be3 Bxe3 13 Qxe3 leaves White with a slight advantage.

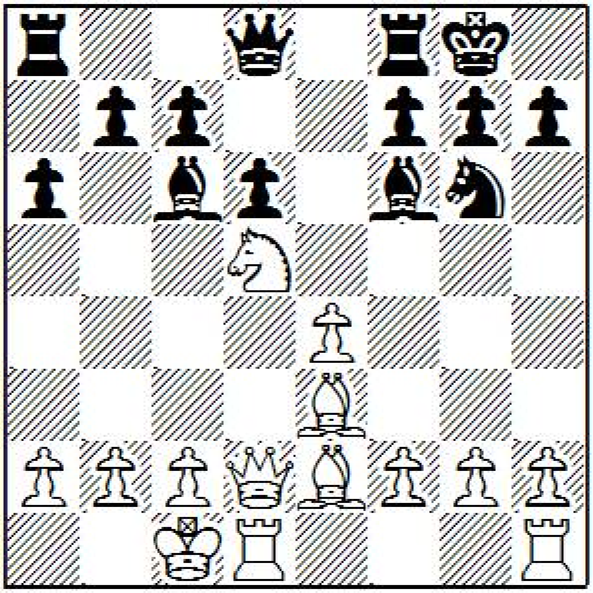


11 ... Bf6 12 Qd2 Bc6 (or 12 ... 0-0 13 f3 Re8 14 Nd5) **13 Nd5**

The preparatory 13 Kb1 is also possible.

13 ... 0-0

White has merely obtained slightly the freer game from the opening, but suddenly Lasker sharply disrupts the positional balance.



14 g4?!

Pawns don’t move backwards! It is hard to say whether this aggressive move was made with the desire to unsettled his tenacious opponent, or if it involved some oversight. It looks logical to play 14 f3 (Lasker), 14 g3 Re8 15 Bf3 and h2-h4-h5, or 14 Nxf6+ Qxf6 15 f3 Bb5 16 c4 Ba4 17 Rde1 with a small plus.

14 ... Re8 15 g5

‘After 15 f3 Bxd5 16 Qxd5 Be5 Black’s control of f4 would have given him a good game. If 15 Nxf6+ Qxf6 16 f3 there could have followed 16 ... Qe6 17 Kb1 d5 or 17 c4 b5 with excellent prospects.’ (Neishtadt)

15 ... Bxd5 16 Qxd5

Dubious is 16 gxf6?! Bxe4 17 f3 Bf5 18 Bd4 c5! 19 Bc3 d5 20 Qxd5 Nf4 21 Qxf5 Nxe2+ 22 Kb1 Nxc3+ 23 bxc3 Qb6+ 24 Ka1 Qxf6 25 Qxf6 gxf6 26 Rd5 Re3 with an extra pawn, while after 16 exd5 Rxe3! 17 fxe3 (or 17 gxf6 Re5 18 fxg7 Qf6) 17 ... Bxg5 and ... Qe7 Black has stable compensation for the pawn: the drawbacks of g2-g4 are felt.

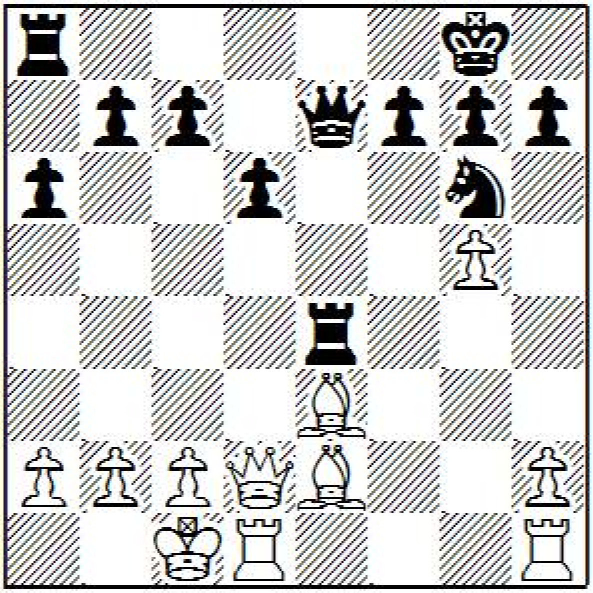
16 ... Re5 17 Qd2?!

Much better was 17 Qxb7! Bxg5 18 Bxg5 Rxg5 19 Rhg1, although after 19 ... Rc5! Black has an easy game: ... a6-a5, ... Rb8, and then an attack on the kingside pawns by ... Qh4, or an attack on the king along the b- and c-files.

17 ... Bxg5!

Possibly Lasker was hoping for 17 ... Rxg5? 18 f4 Rg2 19 Qe1, when the black rook is ‘offside’.

18 f4 Rxe4! 19 fxg5 Qe7

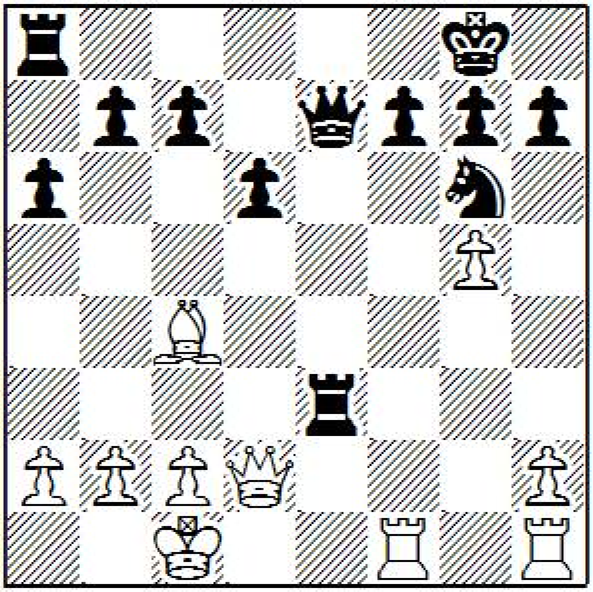


20 Rdf1?

20 Bf3 Rxe3 21 Bxb7 suggests itself, for example: 21 ... Rb8 (21 ... Re2 22 Rhe1 Rxd2 23 Rxe7 Rxd1+ 24 Kxd1 Nxe7 25 Bxa8 a5 is unclear) 22 Rhe1 Rxe1 (little is promised by 22 ... Re5 23 Bxa6 Qxg5 24 Qxg5 Rxg5 25 Bc4 Ne5 26 Bd5) 23 Rxe1 Qd7 24 Bd5 (24 Bxa6?! Qa4) 24 ... Ne5 with only some advantage to Black.

20 ... Rxe3 21 Bc4

Two pawns down, in a difficult, objectively lost position, White tries to create an attack by h2-h4-h5 etc.



21 ... Nh8!?

Typical Steinitz! The commentators admired this eccentric move, although it is apparently not the strongest. 21 ... Qxg5 would have retained some advantage, for example: 22 Rxf7 Kh8 23 Rxc7 Rae8 24 Rd1 Ne5 25 h4 Qf4 26 Bd5 b5, or 22 Rhg1 Qh6 23 Bxf7+ Kh8 24 Bxg6 hxg6 25 Rxg6 Qxg6 26 Qxe3 Re8. However, 21 ... Rf8! was the most logical, and if 22 h4 Re4 23 h5 either 23 ... Rxc4 24 hxg6 hxg6 25 Re1?! (25 Kb1 Re4 also brings no joy) 25 ... Re4! (Zak considered only 25 ... Qd8? 26 Reg1 and Qh2) 26 Rxe4 Qxe4 27 Qh2 f5 winning, or 23 ... Ne5!? (Neishtadt) 24 Bd5 Rg4 25 g6 hxg6 26 hxg6 Nxg6 27 Bxb7 Qg5 and Black should win.

22 h4 c6 23 g6!

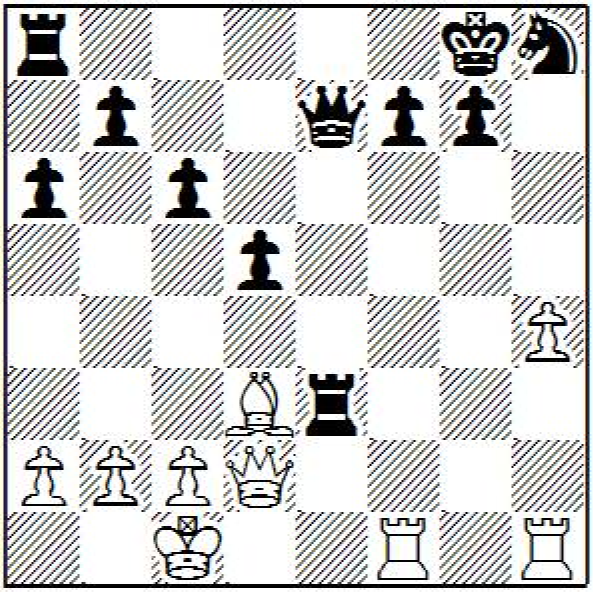
The only chance: hopeless is 23 Rfg1 d5 24 Bd3 Ng6 25 h5 Nf4 or 23 Bd3 Re8 24 Rhg1 Qe6 25 Kb1 b5 26 h5 c5. There now begins a sequence of irrational play, in which Lasker, as it transpires, is superior to his opponent. The problem of this position is that in nearly all variations Black is close to a win, but everywhere White retains some counter-chances. To evaluate where there are more of them, and where there are less, is not easy, and for more than a dozen moves Steinitz is obliged to solve a rather ticklish problem: how not to lose his decisive advantage?

23 ... d5?!

This possibly does not yet throw away the win, but clearly better was 23 ... hxg6! 24 h5 g5! (24 ... gxh5 25 Rxh5 Re8 26 Rhh1 Qe5! will also do, or 24 ... d5 25 hxg6 Nxg6 26 Bd3 Rxd3!, but not 26 ... Nf8?! 27 Qh2 f6 28 Bf5 with compensation for the material deficit) 25 h6 gxh6! (unclear is 25 ... g6?! 26 h7+ Kg7 – 26 ... Kf8 27 Bxf7! – 27 Qh2! f5 28 Qh6+ Kf6 29 Bg8!) 26 Rxh6 (or 26 Qh2 Qf8 27 Rfg1 Re5) 26 ... Re8! 27 Kd1 (27 Rhh1 Qe5) 27 ... Qe4 and the game is decided: 28 Rfh1 Ng6 29 Bd3 Qg4+ 30 Kc1 Qg3 31 Kd1 Nh4, or 28 Bd3 Qg4+ 29 Kc1 Qg3 30 Kd1 R8e6 etc.

24 gxh7+ Kxh7 25 Bd3+ Kg8

By Steinitz’s standards, the position is won, but Lasker continues fighting.

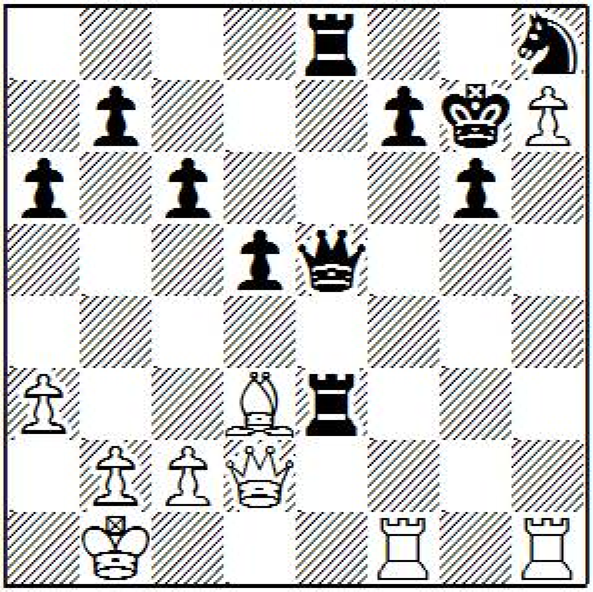


26 h5 Re8 27 h6 (27 Rfg1!?) **27 ... g6 28 h7+ Kg7 29 Kb1!?**

In this game there is something of the ‘Tal’ element: White’s attack is rather abstract, but it will not come to an end – all the time some threats arise! It is a kind of lingering compensation, which there also is after 29 Qh2!? Qg5 30 Kb1 c5 31 Rfg1 Qe5 32 Qh6+ Kf6.

29 ... Qe5 30 a3

Lasker’s last two quiet moves were completely inexplicable to his contemporaries: how can you play this way when two pawns down?!



30 ... c5

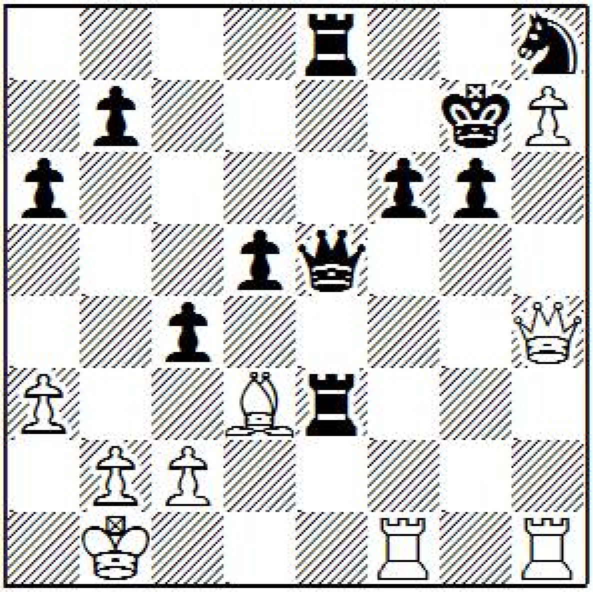
‘Very strong was 30 ... Re6, parrying the queen manoeuvre carried out in the game. If 31 Qf2 there would have followed 31 ... Rf6.’ (Neishtadt) However, after 31 Qb4! b5 32 Qh4 all is by no means so clear.

31 Qf2 (31 c3? c4 32 Bc2 Re2! and 31 Be2 Qe4 32 Bd3 Qd4 33 Qh2 f5 34 Rd1 Qe5 35 Qh6+ Kf7 both fail) **31 ... c4 32 Qh4**

But not 32 Bxg6? fxg6 33 Qh4 Nf7.

32 ... f6

According to Chigorin, 32 ... Kf8 was completely safe, avoiding weakening the g6-square. But even here after 33 Bf5! gxf5 (Neishtadt suggested the ‘restrained’ 33 ... Re7?, overlooking 34 Bxg6! Nxg6 35 Rhg1 and wins) 34 Rhg1 f6 35 Rg8+ Ke7 36 Rfg1 Re4 37 Qf2 it is altogether unclear who is winning.



33 Bf5

A key moment: to keep his attack alive, Lasker now also gives up a piece. He subtly sensed that the misplaced black king and the ‘sleeping’ knight at h8 would promise White excellent compensation: 33 ... gxf5?! 34 Rhg1+ Kf7 35 Qh5+ Ke7 36 Rxf5 etc. So how should Black play? Even a powerful computer required a considerable amount of time to understand this intricate position ...

33 ... Kf7?!

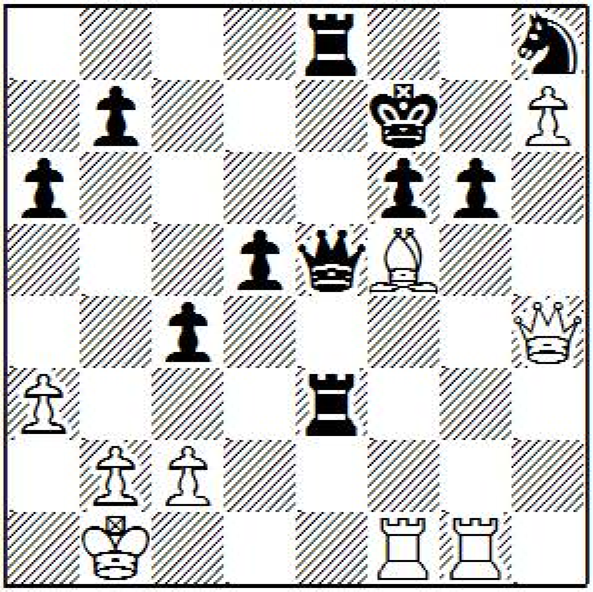
Not an easy choice. Later those researching the games of Steinitz and Lasker suggested two ‘ways to win’:

1) 33 ... Qg3 34 Qh6+ Kf7 35 Rhg1? Re1+ 36 Ka2 Qxg1!, but here 35 Bd7! Rd8 36 Rh3 Qe1+ 37 Rxe1 Rxe1+ 38 Ka2 Rxd7 is unclear;

2) 33 ... Rg3 34 Ka2 (but not 34 Re1? Qxe1+ 35 Rxe1 Rxe1+ 36 Ka2 Rgg1 and wins) 34 ... Qd6!, although 34 Bg4! is stronger, when there is still all to play for.

34 Rhg1!

34 Bh3 and Bg2 is too slow.



34 ... gxf5

‘Here it is, the decisive mistake!’ ‘Suicidal!’ – exclaimed the commentators, maintaining that there was nothing threatening Black, and recommending the ‘winning’ 34 ... b5 (or 34 ... c3): if 35 Qh6 there is 35 ... Rg3! In fact, far stronger is 35 Bxg6+! Nxg6 36 Qg4! (but not 36 Rxg6? Re1+ 37 Rxe1 Qxe1+ 38 Qxe1 Rxe1+ 39 Ka2 Rh1 and Black wins) 36 ... Nh8 37 Qg7+!? (37 Qd7+ Re7 38 Qc8 Re8 39 Qd7+ is sufficient for a draw) 37 ... Ke6 38 Qb7 with a powerful attack, for example: 38 ... f5 39 Rg8 Kd6 40 Rxe8 Qxe8 41 Rxf5 Re5 42 Qxa6+ Kc5 43 Qa7+ Kd6 44 Qb6+ Kd7 45 Qxb5+ Kd6 46 Qb4+ Kc6 47 Rf8 and wins.

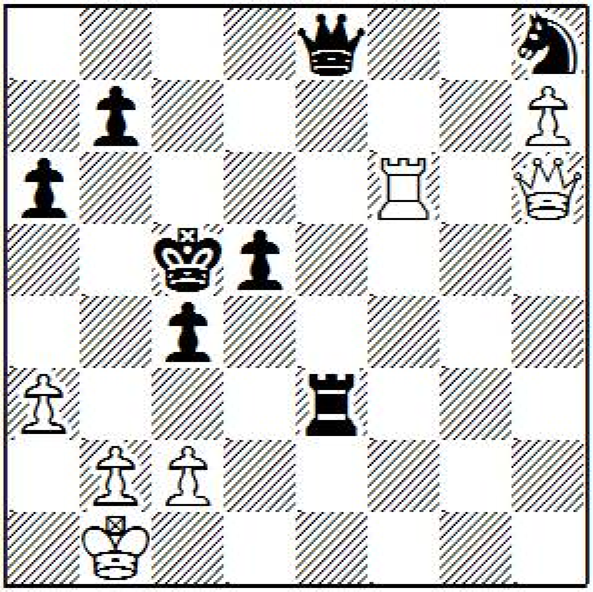
35 Qh5+ Ke7 36 Rg8

Inferior is 36 Rxf5?! Qe6 37 Rg7+ Kd8 38 Rxd5+ Kc8 39 Qh2 Re5 and Black wins.

36 ... Kd6?!

But this really would seem to be a mistake. Safer was 36 ... Kd7 (or 36 ... Kd8) 37 Rxf5 Qe6 38 Rxd5+ Kc7 with unclear play. However, only a thorough analysis of the further events in the game enables such a conclusion to be drawn.

37 Rxf5 Qe6 38 Rxe8 (38 Qh2+?! Re5) **38 ... Qxe8 39 Rxf6+** (39 Rxd5+ Ke7) **39 ... Kc5** (the alternative 39 ... Kc7 40 Qxd5 is also very unpleasant) **40 Qh6**



40 ... Re7?

How hard it was for Steinitz to defend! Later Chigorin recommended 40 ... Qe7 (and if 41 Qf8?, then 41 ... Qxf8 42 Rxf8 Ng6 43 Rg8 Rh3), but after 41 Rf8! I was unable to find a draw for Black, although this position was on my computer for a long time. To all appearances, White’s attack is irresistible:

1) 41 ... Re6 42 Qd2! (a very important manoeuvre; earlier they considered only 42 Rc8+ Kb6! with double-edged play, but not 42 ... Rc6? 43 Qd2!! Qxh7 44 Rxh8! Qxh8 45 Qb4+ Kd4 46 Qc3+) 42 ... Qxh7 43 Rc8+ Rc6 44 Rxh8 Qf7 45 Rf8 Qd7 46 Qb4+ Kd4 47 Rf1 Qd8 48 Rd1+ Ke5 49 Re1+ Kf6 50 Qc3+ Kf7 51 Qh3 Kg7 52 Rh1 winning;

2) 41 ... Re1+ 42 Ka2 Re6 43 Qd2! (the same key manoeuvre) 43 ... Qxh7 44 Rc8+ Rc6 45 Qb4+ Kd4 46 Rxh8 Qxc2 47 Rh4+ Ke5 48 Qe7+ Re6 49 Qc7+ Rd6 50 Rh3 Qg6 51 Qe7+ Re6 52 Re3+ Kf5 53 Qd7 Qg8 54 Qxd5+ Kf6 55 Rf3+ Ke7 56 Qxb7+, and the curtain comes down.

Only 40 ... Re2! would have saved Black, for example: 41 Qg7 Re7 42 Qg1+ Re3 (42 ... d4?! 43 Qg5+ Re5 44 Qg8 d3?! 45 cxd3 cxd3 46 Qb3!) 43 Qg8 Re7 44 Rf8 Qg6 45 Rc8+ Kd6 with a shaky equilibrium.

41 Qh2!!

Quite brilliant; if 41 Rf8?, then 41 ... Rxh7! White also fails to win by 41 Qd2!? Qd8.

41 ... Qd7

41 ... Qd8 would have been refuted by 42 Qf2+ Kb5 43 b3! (43 Rf8 Re8 is not so clear) 43 ... Re1+ 44 Kb2 Re3 45 bxc4+ Ka4 46 cxd5 Re4 47 d6. And if 41 ... Rd7 decisive is 42 Qg1+! (Neishtadt's suggestion of 42 Qf2+ d4 43 Rf8 Qe4 44 Rxh8 is inferior in view of 44 ... Rxh7) 42 ... d4 43 Qg5+ Rd5 44 Qd2.

42 Qg1+ d4 (otherwise mate) **43 Qg5+ Qd5 44 Rf5 Qxf5** (44 ... Re1+ 45 Ka2 does not change anything) **45 Qxf5+ Kd6 46 Qf6+ 1-0**

In this game, balancing on the edge of the abyss, the young Lasker demonstrated those qualities that were to enable him to hold the crown of world champion for such a long time. In a difficult position he managed to set his opponent very tricky problems, typical of the level of chess in the second half of the 20th century (similar to those that very strong opponents were set by Tal or, say, Shirov). Lasker was far ahead of his time, and it is hard to blame Steinitz for his mistakes: he fought with all his might, under a continual and savage attack. Because this ultra-tense game was ahead of its time, it was overshadowed and remained underrated: their contemporaries simply could not understand what happened in it ...

I think that the seventh game became the decisive one in the match, breaking Steinitz's resistance. He experienced an almost mystical horror: was this really possible?! Such things don't happen!! 'Whereas the champion endured with fortitude the purely chess defeats, again mobilising himself completely for the next game, this psychological defeat strongly affected him. All the systemic connections in his defensive methods and rules collapsed. After this Steinitz lost a further four games in succession!' (B. Vainstein)

The outcome of the match was decided, and its Montreal part merely determined the final score: +10 -5 =4 in favour of Lasker, who thus became the second world champion in history. After losing the final, 19th game, Steinitz got up with difficulty from his chair, leaning on his stick, and pronounced three 'hurrahs' for the new 'world chess king' and promptly ... settled down to play cards with some friends.

Although Lasker had gained a convincing victory, the chess world was not in a hurry to acknowledge him as the true champion: many explained Steinitz's defeat as being due to his advanced age and the fact that he was unwell. Tarrasch (who, incidentally, had won his fourth international tournament in succession, Leipzig 1894) also had a dig at his expense: 'The final games of the match merely provoke profound regret. Whereas in the initial games, especially the seventh, the usual strength of the old master is no longer apparent, the remainder increasingly resemble the last games of Zukertort, who late in life completely lost his inherent strength, resourcefulness, initiative, confidence ... ’

American Tragedy

Hastings 1895 – the most important tournament of the 19th century, which assembled the entire cream of world chess – was called on to clarify the situation at the top. As was written in the press, ‘the fact alone that among the participants is the star quartet – Lasker, Steinitz, Tarrasch and Chigorin – gives it historic significance.’

However, suddenly the hitherto unknown young American Harry Nelson Pillsbury (1872-1906) intervened in the battle of the stars. After losing in the first round to Chigorin, he then set a furious pace (9½ out of 10!) and burst into the leading group, staggering everyone with his powerful, forceful play. Take, for example, his win over Tarrasch!

Game 38

H.Pillsbury-S.Tarrasch

Hastings 1895, 2nd round

Queen’s Gambit D55

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6

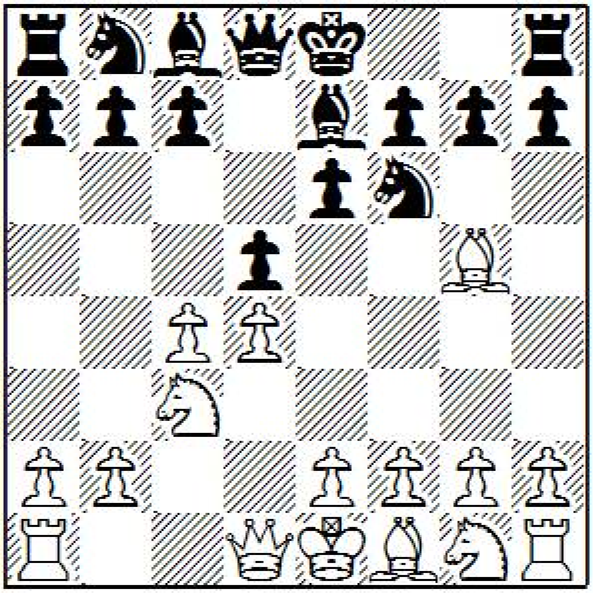
Later Tarrasch became a fervent supporter of the defence 3 ... c5, which bears his name.

4 Bg5

This move, known since the middle of the century and tried by Steinitz against Anderssen (Vienna 1873), became a formidable force in Pillsbury’s hands.

4 ... Be7

Soon afterwards Pillsbury himself suggested the original defence 4 ... Nbd7 5 e3 c6 6 Nf3 Qa5, which later became known in opening theory as the Cambridge Springs Variation.



5 Nf3

In the event of 5 e3 0-0 6 Nf3 b6 7 cxd5 exd5 (7 ... Nxd5!?) 8 Bd3 White saves a tempo on Rc1, and here is what can result from this:

1) 8 ... Bb7 (8 ... Be6!?) 9 Ne5 (Rubinstein played 9 Qc2!? Nbd7 10 0-0-0 – *Game No.60*, and Geller – 9 0-0 Nbd7 10 Qe2 c5 11 Ba6!) 9 ... Nbd7 10 f4 c5 (10 ... Ne4!? 11 Bxe7 Qxe7 12 Bxe4 dxe4 13 0-0 f5 with an unclear game, Pillsbury-Schiffers, Vienna 1898; Pillsbury-Mason, Monte Carlo 1903) 11 0-0 c4 (11 ... a6 12 Qf3 Re8 13 Rad1 cxd4 14 exd4 b5 15 a3 Rc8? 16 Bf5 Rc7 17 Nxd7 Nxd7 18 Bxe7 Rxe7 19 Nxd5 with a won game Pillsbury-Gottschall, Hanover 1902; 11 ... cxd4!?) 12 Bc2 a6 13 Qf3 b5 14 Qh3 g6 15 f5 b4 16 fxg6 hxg6 17 Qh4! bxc3 18 Nxd7 Qxd7 19 Rxf6! and White won (Pillsbury-Marco, Paris 1900);

2) 8 ... Nbd7 9 0-0 c5 10 Ne5 Nxe5 (10 ... Bb7 11 f4) 11 dxe5 Nd7 12 Bf4 Bb7 13 Qf3 Re8 14 Qh3 Nf8 15 Rad1 Ng6 16 Bg3! Bf8 17 f4 a6 18 Bc2 b5 19 e6! fxe6 20 f5 exf5 21 Qxf5 with an attack (Schlechter-Janowski, Ostend 1905).

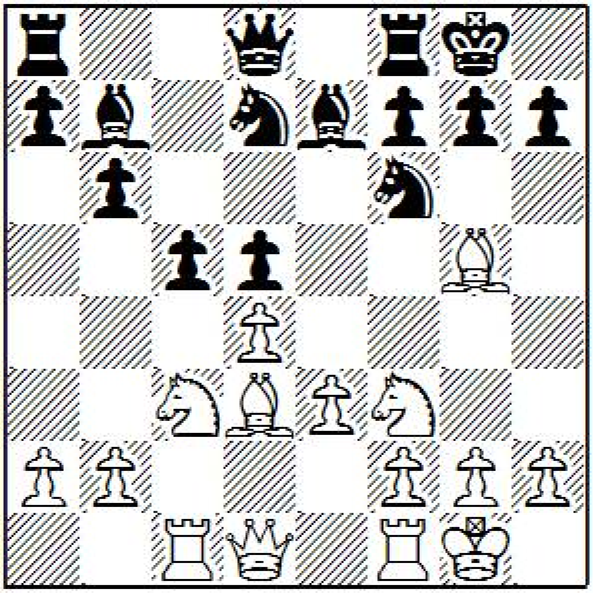
5 ... Nbd7 6 Rc1 0-0 7 e3 b6 (7 ... c6!) **8 cxd5 exd5 9 Bd3**

Or immediately 9 Ne5 (9 Qa4 – *Game Nos.79, 89*) 9 ... Bb7 10 f4, for example: 10 ... a6 11 Bd3 c5 12 0-0 c4 13 Bf5 b5 14 Rf3 Re8 15 Rh3 g6 16 Bb1 Nxe5 17 fxe5 Nd7 18 Bxe7 Rxe7 19 Qf3 Nf8 20 Rf1 Qd7 21 Qf6 b4?

(21 ... Re6!) 22 Na4! Qc7 23 Nc5 Bc8 24 Rh6 a5 25 Rf4 Rb8 26 Bxg6! 1-0 (Pillsbury-Wolf, Monte Carlo 1903).

9 ... Bb7 10 0-0 c5

A *tabiya* of the variation that is known in opening theory as the orthodox fianchetto.



11 Re1?!

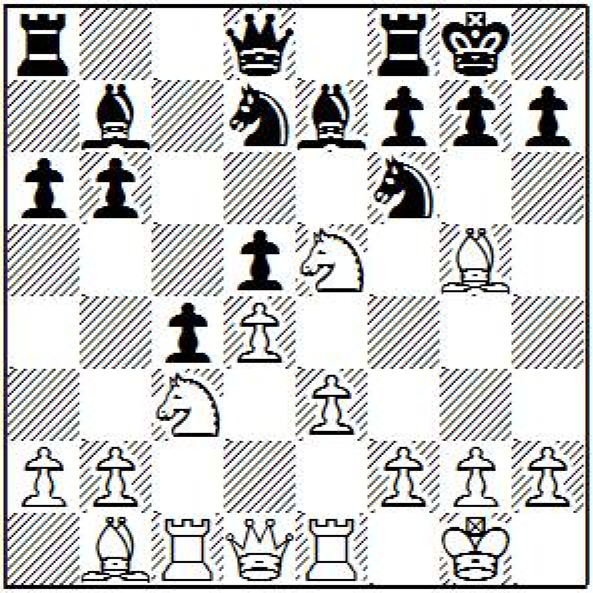
A waste of an important tempo, as is 11 Bb1?! Ne4! equalising (Pillsbury-Schlechter, Hastings 1895). However, we should not forget how hard it is to take the first steps ... 11 Ne5 is premature in view of 11 ... Nxe5 12 dxe5 Ne4! with equality (Marshall-Janowski, Paris 3rd matchgame 1905), therefore White must find the optimal move order. Modern theory prefers 11 Bf5, while in those years the best was thought to be Schlechter’s recommendation 11 Qe2:

1) 11 ... c4 (after 11 ... cxd4?! 12 exd4 and Ne5 there is the additional threat of Ba6) 12 Bb1 a6 13 Ne5! b5 14 f4 h6?! (14 ... Ne4 15 Bxe4 dxe4 16 Nxd7 Qxd7 17 Bxe7 Qxe7 18 f5 f6 19 Rf4 with the initiative, Vidmar-Yates, London 1922; 14 ... Re8!? 15 Rf3 Ne4 16 Rh3 Nf8 is more solid) 15 Bh4 Re8 16 Rf3 Ne4 17 Bxe7 Qxe7 18 Bxe4 dxe4 19 Rg3 Nf6 20 a4! b4 21 Nd1 c3 22 bxc3 bxc3 23 Rxc3 and White gradually won (Pillsbury-Janowski, Vienna 1898);

2) 11 ... Ne4!? 12 Bf4 Nxc3 13 bxc3 c4 14 Bf5 (inferior is 14 Bb1?! b5 15 Ne5 a5 16 Qf3 Nxe5 17 Bxe5 Ra6! Euwe-Menchik, Carlsbad 1923) 14 ... g6 15 Bxd7 Qxd7 16 Ne5 Qe6 17 Bh6 ‘with advantage to White’ (Tartakower), although after 17 ... Rfe8 no particular advantage is apparent.

11 ... c4 (here too 11 ... Ne4 is not bad, but Tarrasch is playing for a win) **12 Bb1 a6 13 Ne5!**

The start of the classic Pillsbury Attack, about which it was later said: ‘If Pillsbury has played Ne5, then Black is lost.’



13 ... b5

White has the advantage after 13 ... Nxe5?! 14 dxe5 Nd7 (14 ... Ne8? 15 Bxe7 and Nxd5; 14 ... Ne4? 15 Bxe7 Qxe7 16 Nxd5 or 15 ... Nxc3 16 Bxh7+!) 15 Bf4! Nc5 16 Qd2 b5 17 Rcd1 (Tartakower).

14 f4 Re8 15 Qf3 Nf8

An economic defence of the kingside – strictly according to Steinitz! – followed by a breakthrough on the queenside.

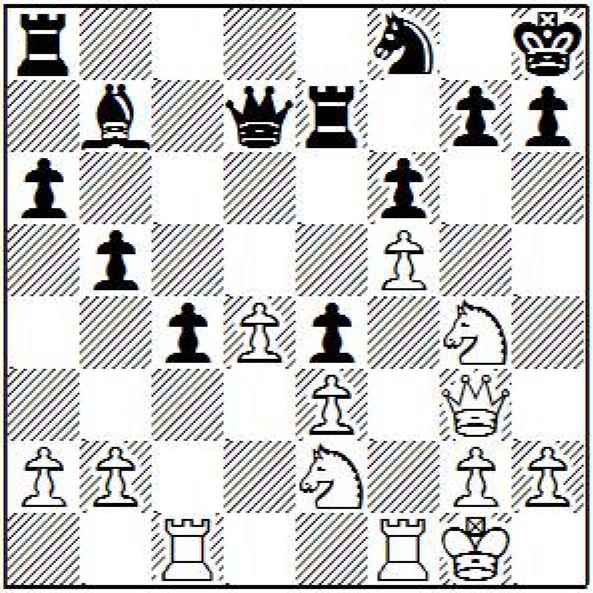
16 Ne2?!

16 a3 would have maintained approximate equality, for example: 16 ... Ne4 17 Bxe7 Rxe7 18 Nxe4 dxe4 19 Qg3 (but not 19 Bxe4? Bxe4 20 Qxe4 f6! and wins) 19 ... Qd6.

16 ... Ne4 (a typical relieving manoeuvre; 16 ... Qa5 17 Ng3 Bb4 18 Re2 is unclear) **17 Bxe7 Rxe7 18 Bxe4 dxe4 19 Qg3**

Inferior is 19 Qh3?! f6 20 Ng4 Bc8.

19 ... f6 20 Ng4 Kh8 (Nxf6+ was threatened; if 20 ... f5? 21 Nh6+ and Nxf5) **21 f5 Qd7 22 Rf1**



22 ... Rd8?!

More accurate was the immediate 22 ... Rae8 (supporting the e4-pawn) 23 Rf4 Bd5 with excellent counterplay on the queenside.

23 Rf4 Qd6 (23 ... Bd5 and ... b5-b4 was more energetic) **24 Qh4 Rde8 25 Nc3 Bd5**

For the moment 25 ... b4?! is unfavourable because of 26 Na4.

26 Nf2

Pillsbury continues manoeuvring, not being tempted by the questionable 26 Nxd5 Qxd5 27 Nxf6?! gxf6 28 Qxf6+ Rg7 29 Qxa6 Ra8 30 Qf6 Qg8 31 Rf2 Rxa2.

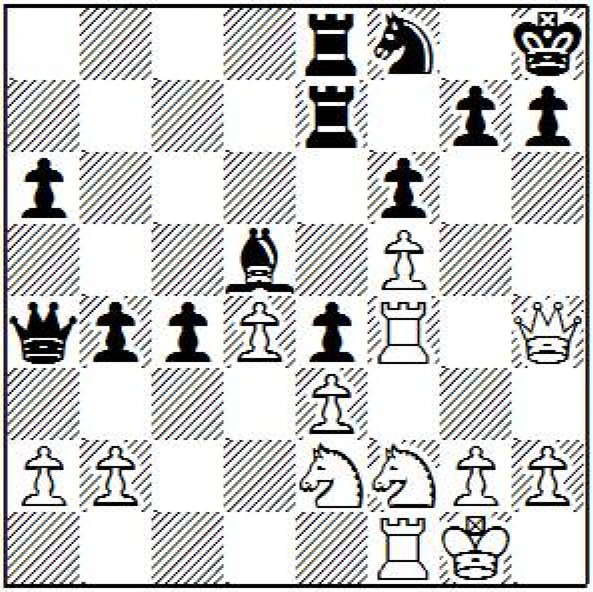
26 ... Qc6! 27 Rf1 b4 28 Ne2

Also after 28 Nxd5 Qxd5 29 Rc1 Black would have been the first to begin: 29 ... c3! 30 bxc3 Qxa2 31 cxb4 Qd2 32 Rd1 Qxe3 etc.

28 ... Qa4?

Up till now, despite a few isolated irregularities, Tarrasch has played in sound positional style, but now, chasing after a pawn, he incorrectly moves his queen away from the defence of his king.

‘28 ... c3! was essential, and if 29 bxc3 (29 b3 a5 30 Nc1 a4!), then 29 ... Bc4 30 Re1 Bxe2 31 Rxe2 bxc3 32 Rc2 Qb5!’ (Lasker) However, here 33 Qg4! Rc7 34 Qd1 is completely unclear, and therefore I would have preferred 29 ... bxc3 30 Nd1 (30 Rc1? c2 31 a4 Rb7 32 a5 Rb1 wins for Black) 30 ... c2 31 Ndc3 Bc4 32 Qe1 Rb7 33 Qd2 Rb2 34 Rc1 Bxe2 35 Nxe2 Rc8 36 Ng3 Rxa2 37 Nxe4 Nd7, and the powerful passed c-pawn forces White to think primarily about defence.



29 Ng4! (with the obvious intention of 29 ... Qxa2? 30 Nxf6! gxf6 31 Qxf6+ Rg7 32 Rg4 winning) **29 ... Nd7 30 R4f2!**

Making way for the knight.

30 ... Kg8

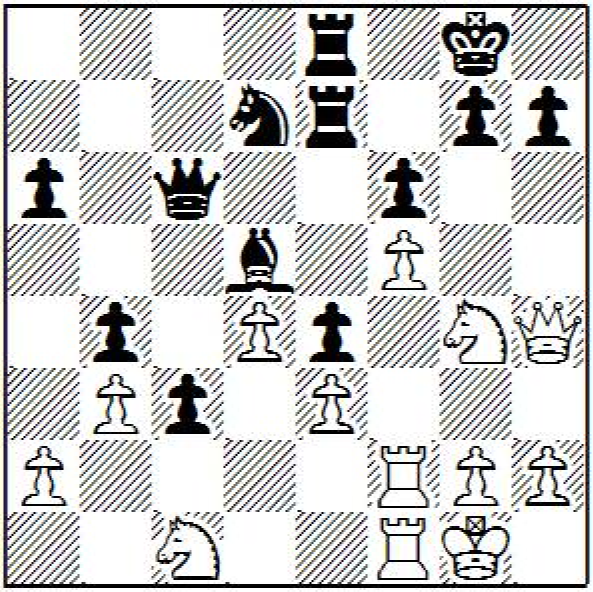
Now 30 ... Qxa2? is bad because of 31 Nf4 – after 31 ... Bf7 White has two tempting possibilities:

1) 32 Ng6+ Kg8! (but not 32 ... Bxg6? 33 fxg6 h6 34 Nxh6! gxh6 35 Qxh6+ Kg8 36 Rf4 or 33 ... Nf8 34 Nxf6 gxf6 35 Rxf6 and Rf7 and White wins in each case) 33 Nxe7+ Rxe7 34 Qg3 Kf8 – after pointing out this defence, Chigorin asked: ‘Do not Black’s two passed pawns, of course after ... Qb3 or ... Qa4-b5(c6) and ... a6-a5, prove decisive as regards White’s fate?’ I would answer: hardly. After 35 Qd6! Qa5 36 Rc2 Nb6 37 Rcc1 Qb5 38 Ra1 (38 Rf4 Nc8 39 Qd8+ Re8 40 Qc7 Ne7 is unclear) 38 ... Na4 39 Nf2 a5 40 Nd1 Bh5 41 Rf4 White has sufficient counterplay;

2) 32 d5! Ne5 33 Nxf6 gxf6 34 Qxf6+ Kg8 35 d6 Rd7 36 Ne6 and wins (Tartakower), or 32 ... Rc8 33 Ng6+! Bxg6 34 fxg6 (34 d6 is also good, for example: 34 ... Ree8 35 fxg6 Nf8 36 d7 or 34 ... Bxf5 35 dxe7 Bg6 36 Rd2) 34 ... Nf8 35 Nxf6 gxf6 36 Rxf6 Nxg6 37 Rxg6 Qxb2 38 Qxe7 with a won game.

31 Nc1 c3 32 b3 Qc6

With nothing to show for his pains ...



Black’s new plan has taken shape: ... a5-a4xb3 and ... Ra8-a3, destroying the opponent’s queenside. White’s sole hope is to storm the king’s fortress, and Pillsbury does this with enormous energy, inventiveness and mastery.

33 h3!

Signalling the start of the offensive. ‘At first sight there is no danger threatening Black. Moreover, the advantage is on his side: for the passed c-pawn there are only two more steps to the queening square. But White, after calculating the variations with mathematical precision, calmly and literally tempo by tempo develops his attack.’ (Gunsberg)

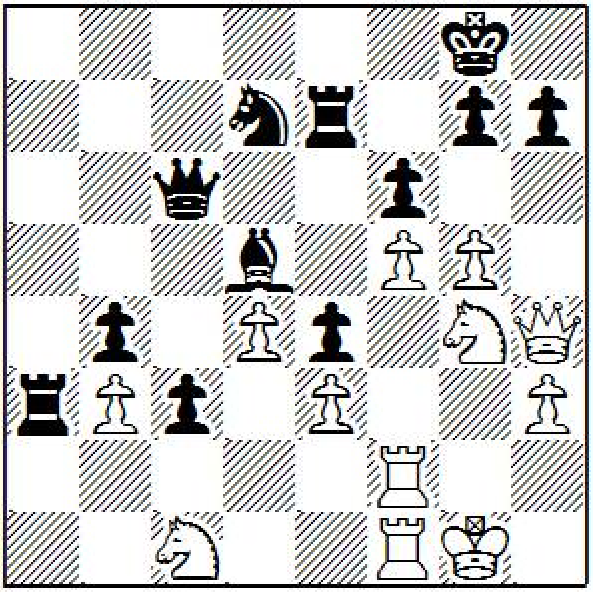
33 ... a5 34 Nh2 a4 35 g4! axb3?!

In my opinion, 35 ... h6!? was more circumspect.

36 axb3 Ra8 (36 ... h6!? 37 Ra2 Ra8) **37 g5 Ra3**

Consistently playing for a win. After 37 ... fxg5 38 Qxg5 Nf6 (38 ... Qf6 39 Qg3 intending Ng4) 39 Ng4 Qd6 40 Rg2! White can breathe more easily: for the moment his b3-pawn is not hanging.

38 Ng4



38 ... Bxb3?

But strong here was the prophylactic 38 ... fxg5! (38 ... Kh8?! 39 Rg2; 38 ... Rxb3? 39 Nxb3 Bxb3 40 Rg2 Kh8 41 gxf6 gxf6 42 Ne5! Nxe5 43 dxe5 and wins) 39 Qxg5 Nf6 40 Rg2 Kf8! (Chigorin), for example: 41 Ne5 Qa6! 42 h4 (42 Ne2? Ra1!) 42 ... Bxb3 43 h5 Bc4 44 h6?! Bxf1 45 hxg7+ Kg8 46 Ng4 Nxg4 47 Qxe7 Qc8 48 Rxg4 Bh3 49 Qxb4 Bxg4 50 Qxa3 Qxf5 51 Qxc3 Qf3, and this wild confrontation concludes to Black's advantage.

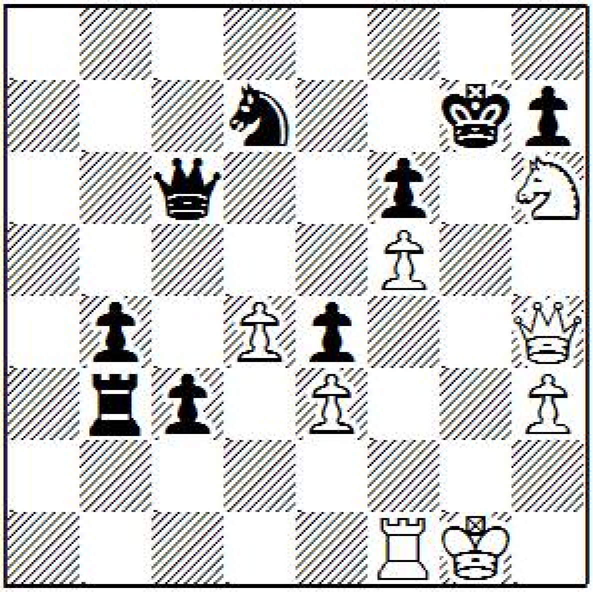
39 Rg2! Kh8 (it is now too late for 39 ... fxg5 40 Qxg5 Kf8 in view of 41 f6!) **40 gxf6 gxf6?!**

'If 40 ... Nxf6 White wins by 41 Ne5 Qd6 42 Ng6+ Kg8 43 Nxe7+ Qxe7 44 Nxb3 Rxb3 45 Kh1 Ra3 46 Rfg1 Ra6 47 Rxg7+ Qxg7 48 Rxg7+ Kxg7 49 Qg3+, and Black is unable to advance either his b-pawn or his c-pawn without losing one of them.' (Chigorin)

An important refinement: after 46 ... Ra6? there is 47 Qh6!, and Black also fails to save the game with 46 ... Kf8 47 Rxg7! Qxg7 48 Rxg7 Kxg7 49 Qg3+ Kf7 50 Qc7+ Kg8 51 Qc4+ Kg7 52 Qxb4 Ra1+ 53 Kg2 Ra2+ 54 Kg3 c2 55 Qb7+ Kh6 56 Qc8! Kg7 57 Kf4. However, after 45 ... c2! (instead of 45 ... Ra3?) 46 Rxc2 Rxe3 47 Rc8+ Kf7 48 Rfc1 Rc3 49 R1xc3 bxc3 50 Rxc3 Qa7 Black would have had a chance of holding on (51 Qg3 Qa1+ 52 Kg2 Qb2+ 53 Kf1 Qb5+ is equal).

41 Nxb3 Rxb3 42 Nh6 Rg7 (if 42 ... Qc8 or 42 ... Qd5, then 43 Qg4) **43 Rxg7 Kxg7**

It appears that White's attack has petered out and that the black pawns are about to have their say ...



44 Qg3+!

A highly unpleasant surprise! 44 Kh1? Qc4 45 Rg1+ Kf8 46 Rg8+ Qxg8 47 Nxg8 c2 would have led to directly the opposite result.

44 ... Kxh6 (44 ... Kf8? 45 Qg8+ and Qxb3) **45 Kh1!**

With the deadly threat of Rg1, whereas 45 Rf4? Rb1+ 46 Kg2 Rb2+ would have led only to a draw.

45 ... Qd5

If 45 ... c2?, then 46 Rg1 c1Q 47 Qh4 mate. Black also fails to save the game by 45 ... Nf8 46 Rg1 Qe8 47 Qg7+ Kh5 48 Qxf6 Ne6 49 fxe6.

46 Rg1 Qxf5 47 Qh4+ Qh5 48 Qf4+ Qg5 49 Rxg5 fxg5 50 Qd6+ Kh5

'The tragedy for Black is that after either king move White captures the knight either with check, or with the threat of an immediate mate, thereby forestalling ... c3-c2.’ (Réti)

51 Qxd7 c2?! (avoiding the agonising 51 ... Rb1+ 52 Kh2 Rb2+ 53 Kg3 Kg6 54 Qe6+ etc.) **52 Qxh7 mate**

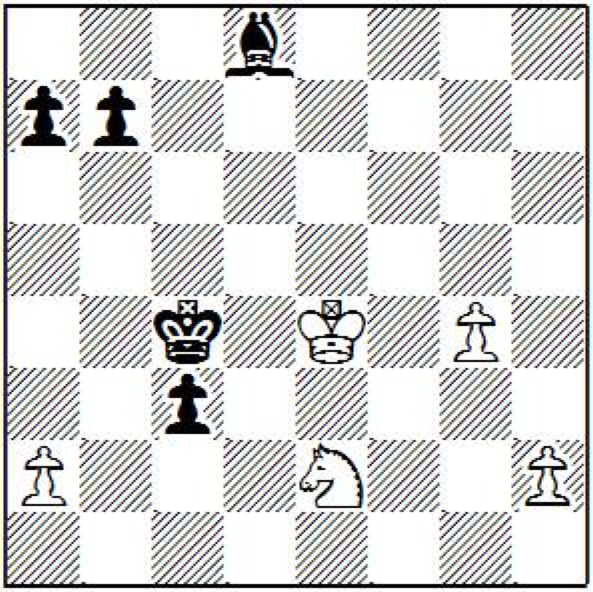
Chigorin and the newly-fledged world champion Lasker performed no less brilliantly in Hastings. Three rounds before the finish the position of the leaders was as follows: Lasker – 14½ out of 18(!); Chigorin – 14; Pillsbury – 13½; Tarrasch – 11 etc.

At this point there occurred the first meeting of the fundamental opponents – Tarrasch and Lasker, which greatly influenced the outcome of the entire tournament. With Black the champion erected the currently fashionable ‘Berlin Wall’ **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 –** *Game No.47*), but White went all out for a win, and the battle in this seemingly tedious endgame became extremely sharp.

Game 39

S.Tarrasch-Em.Lasker

Hastings 1895, 19th round



41 Kf5?!

A desperate move! If 41 Nd4 b5 42 Nc2 b4 43 Ne3+ Kc5 the bishop is stronger than the knight; White was also not satisfied with the drawn but unpleasant queen ending a pawn down after 41 Nxc3 Kxc3 42 Kf5 b5 43 g5 Bxg5 44 Kxg5 Kb2 45 h4 Kxa2 46 h5 b4 47 h6 b3 48 h7 b2 50 h8Q b1Q.

41 ... Kd3??

Lasker, Tarrasch and other commentators thought that 41 ... c2! would have given Black only a draw: 42 g5 Bxg5 43 Kxg5 Kd3 44 Nc1+ Kd2 45 Nb3+ Kd1 46 a4 (46 h4 b5! 47 h5 a5 48 h6 a4) 46 ... a5 47 Kf5 (47 h4 b5!) 47 ... b5 48 axb5 a4 49 Nc1 Kxc1 50 b6 a3 51 b7 a2 52 b8Q a1Q 53 Qf4+ Kb1 54 Qe4 'etc.' However, after 54 ... Qc3 he wins! Those wishing to learn the winning method can look in Averbakh's *Comprehensive Chess Endings* ...

42 Nxc3! (now there is no stopping the passed pawns) **42 ... Kxc3 43 g5 Bb6 44 h4 Bd4 45 h5 b5 46 h6 b4 47 g6 a5 48 g7 a4 49 g8Q 1-0**

In the following round Chigorin also crashed, losing in 16 moves to Janowski (*Game No.32*). But Pillsbury won his three concluding games and, to general astonishment, finished first, ahead of the entire formidable 'star quartet'! Chigorin was half a point behind, Lasker a point, and Tarrasch and Steinitz even further ...

Thus Hastings 1895 did not clarify the situation at the top, but further confused it: the world champion did not manage to demonstrate his superiority, and in addition a new challenger appeared. 'Pillsbury is a brilliant player, and his play is full of deep ideas,' wrote Tarrasch. 'But in my view it was the famous Russian master Chigorin who played best of all ... The third prize-winner Lasker showed for the first time that he too is a very strong player. All his previous successes were exaggerated by unparalleled publicity ... '

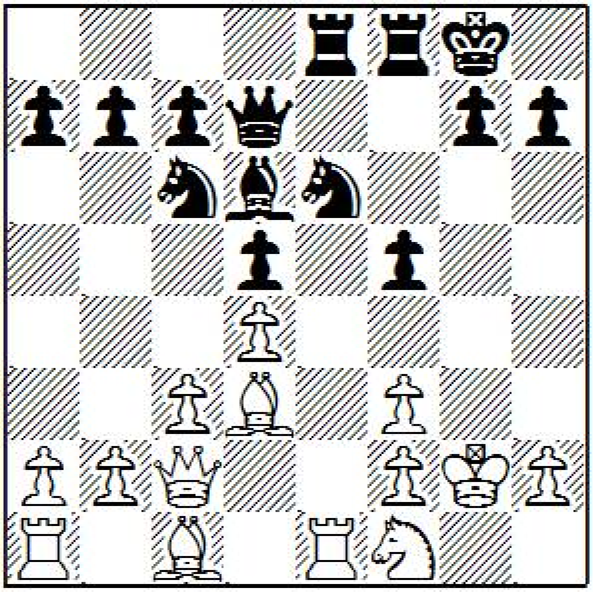
It was a pity that the fourth prize-winner Tarrasch, again citing busyness at work, avoided a decisive fight with his rivals in the St Petersburg match-tournament (1895/96). This was the first super-elite competition in history, a kind of prototype of the world championship match-tournament of 1948. The four strongest – Lasker, Steinitz, Chigorin and Pillsbury – played one another six times. Need it be said what prestige and what rights would be acquired in the eyes of the chess world by the winner of such a battle?!

The first half of the match-tournament developed into a fierce race between Pillsbury and Lasker. Initially the lead was seized by the energetic 23-year-old American. He was paired against the world champion in the very first round. As White Lasker played extremely badly against a Petroff Defence and suffered an opening catastrophe.

Game 40

Em.Lasker-H.Pillsbury

St Petersburg 1895/96, 1st round



17 ... Nexd4! 18 Qd1 Rxe1 19 Qxe1 Nxf3!! 20 Kxf3

If 20 Qd1, then 20 ... Nce5.

20 ... f4! (20 ... Ne5+!? 21 Ke2 Qe8 is also good) **21 Qd1**

After 21 Ke2 Re8+ 22 Ne3 fxe3 23 fxe3 there is the spectacular 23 ... Nd4+!! (23 ... Qg4+ 24 Kd2 Nd4! is also possible) 24 Kd1 (24 cxd4 Qg4+ 25 Kd2 Bb4+ or 25 Kf2 Rf8+) 24 ... Qa4+ 25 b3 Nxb3 and wins.

21 ... Ne5+ 22 Ke2 Qg4+ 23 Kd2 Qxd1+ 24 Kxd1 Nxd3

... Black won.

In the second cycle Pillsbury again defeated Lasker(!), this time in a classic ending with knight against bishop (cf. the note to the ninth move in *Game No.55*), and in the third cycle he gained a draw without particular anxiety, once more in a Petroff Defence. Apart from that he crushed Chigorin three times and only the ‘old lion’ Steinitz withstood the American’s pressure. In turn, Lasker scored 2½ out of 3 against Steinitz and Chigorin, and after three cycles the scores were as follows: Pillsbury – 6½ out of 9; Lasker 5½; Steinitz – 4½; Chigorin – 1½.

Halfway through the tournament a five-day break was announced. The participants greeted the New Year and – as Tarrasch had done a couple of years earlier, when he played his match in St Petersburg with Chigorin – later remembered for a long time the extraordinary hospitality of the organisers together with all the delights of life in the Capital. The latter, however, did not apply to Chigorin, who, as director of the St Petersburg Chess Society, bore a heavy burden of administrative problems throughout the tournament ...

And then came the day of the fourth meeting between the leader and the world champion, 4 January 1896. Had Pillsbury won – and he was playing White – the outcome of the match-tournament was would have been practically decided. The ultra-talented American would have clearly become the No.1 challenger, and Lasker would possibly have had to play an official match with him for the world championship, under conditions highly unfavourable for him ... But things turned out differently.

Game 41

H.Pillsbury-Em.Lasker

St Petersburg 1895/96, 10th round

Queen’s Gambit D50

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 c5 5 Bg5

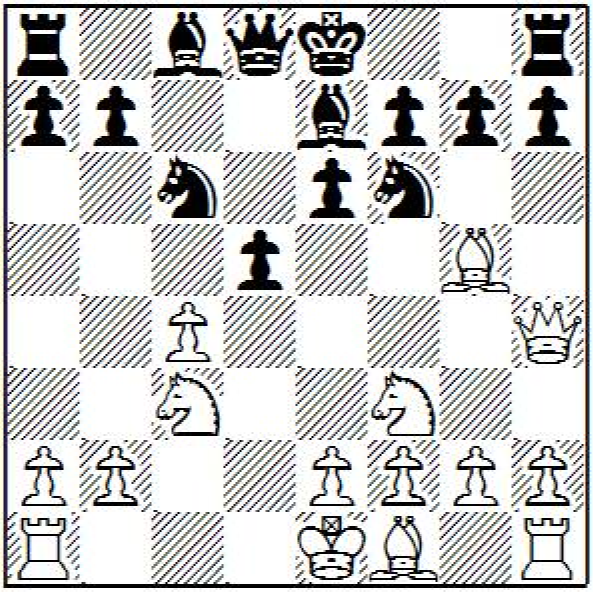
Pillsbury’s favourite move. Nowadays 5 cxd5 or 5 e3 is preferred.

5 ... cxd4 6 Qxd4 (after 6 Nxd4, as was established only in the 20th century, 6 ... e5 equalises) **6 ... Nc6**

Quieter is 6 ... Be7!? (Lasker) 7 cxd5 exd5 8 e3 Nc6 and ... 0-0.

7 Qh4?! (7 Bxf6! is correct – *Game No.42*) **7 ... Be7**

The pedigree of this variation extends from the game Blackburne-Schowalter (New York 1889), which went 7 ... d4? 8 0-0-0 e5 9 e3 Bc5 10 exd4 exd4 11 Nd5 Qa5 12 Bxf6 gxf6 13 Nxf6+ Kf8 14 Re1 Be6 15 Rxe6! fxe6 16 Qh6+ with crushing threats.



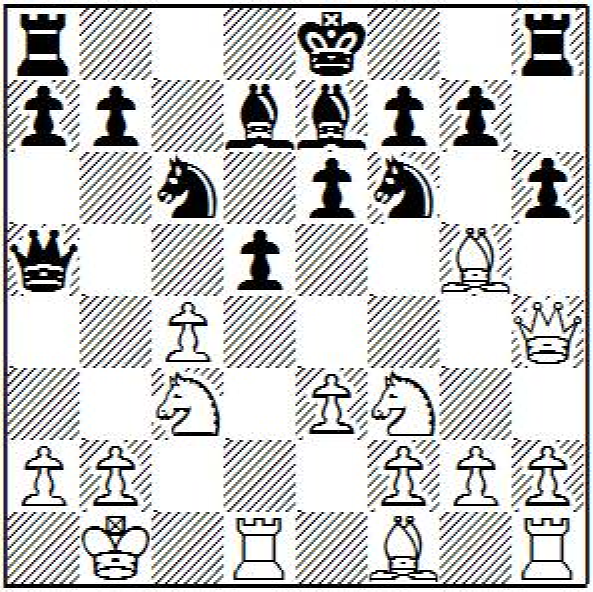
8 0-0-0?!

A risky idea. However, if 8 e3, then 8 ... Qb6 is unpleasant, for example: 9 Rb1 h6! 10 Bd3 dxc4 11 Bxc4 0-0, and 12 Bxh6?! gxh6 13 Qxh6 is bad in view of 13 ... Qc5! Instead 8 cxd5 exd5 9 Rd1 is perhaps more solid, but it was not for this that Pillsbury played 5 Bg5 and 6 Qxd4.

8 ... Qa5 9 e3

In one of the simultaneous displays he gave in 1900, Lasker risked 9 cxd5 exd5 10 e3 Be6 11 Nd4 Rc8 12 Kb1 h6 13 Nxe6 fxe6 14 Qh3 Kf7 15 Bf4, but he could have paid for this in the event of 15 ... Nb4! 16 a3 Rxc3!

9 ... Bd7 10 Kb1 h6!

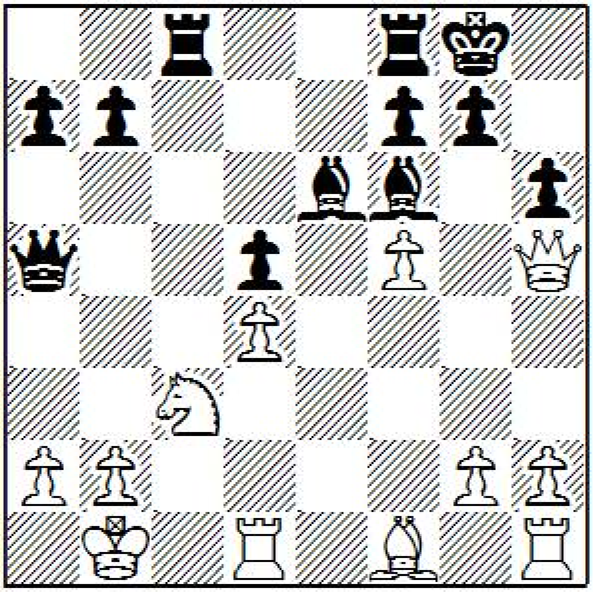


‘A seemingly simple, but basically brilliant move.’ (B. Vainstein) ‘Thus either the bishop must be exchanged or the white queen stay where it is.’ (Lasker)

11 cxd5 exd5 12 Nd4 0-0! 13 Bxf6 (if 13 Bxh6?! gxh6 14 Qxh6 there is the adequate reply 14 ... Ne4) **13 ... Bxf6 14 Qh5**

Not even contemplating the restrained 14 Qg3.

14 ... Nxd4 15 exd4 Be6! (Lasker already knows how to reply to the advance of the f-pawn) **16 f4** (16 Ne4? Bxd4!; 16 Bc4 Rfd8! and ... Rac8) **16 ... Rac8 17 f5**



17 ... Rxc3!!

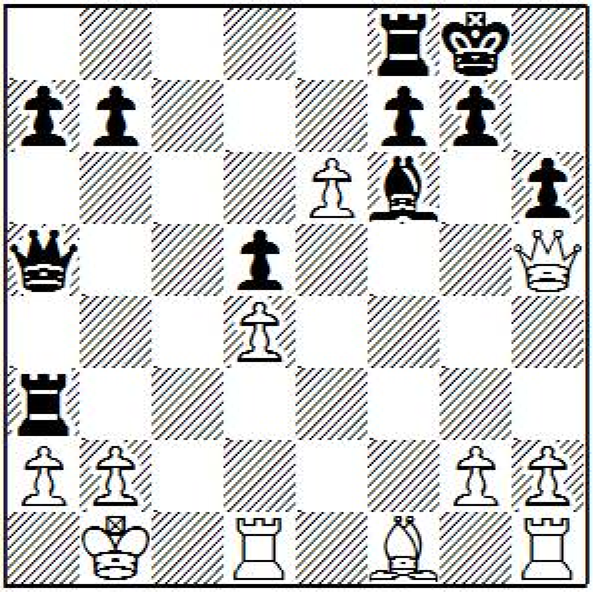
A fine, deeply calculated combination, which any grandmaster could be proud of even today. It is beyond the powers of even a strong computer – here additional forces are needed ... Whereas after the prosaic 17 ... Bd7 18 Qf3 the chances would have become double-edged.

18 fxe6

Pillsbury avoids 18 bxc3, not wishing to go into a depressing endgame with problematic drawing chances after 18 ... Qxc3 19 Qf3! (19 fxe6? Qb4+ and ... Rc8) 19 ... Qxf3! (less clear is 19 ... Qb4+ 20 Qb3 Bxf5+ 21 Bd3 Qxb3+ 22 axb3 Bg4 23 Rd2 Bxd4 24 Bc2 Bf6 25 Rxd5 Rc8 26 Bf5) 20 gxf3 Bxf5+ 21 Bd3 Bh3. Or perhaps he had noticed the unexpected quiet move 18 ... Bd7!!, when after 19 Qf3 Rc8 Black has a decisive attack: 20 Rc1 Bxd4 21 cxd4 Bxf5+ and ... Qb4+; 20 Kb2 Bxf5 21 Be2 Be4 22 Qh3 Rc6; 20 Rd3 Bb5 21 Re3 Bxd4 22 Bxb5 (22 cxd4 Qb4+ 23 Rb3 Qe1+) 22 ... Qxb5+ 23 Ka1 Bxe3 (pr 23 ... Bf6!? 24 Rb1 Qc5 25 Rxb7 d4) 24 Qxe3 Qc4 25 Kb2 Rc6.

18 ... Ra3!!

The point of the combination! This paradoxical rook sacrifice forces the white king to begin a fight for its own existence.

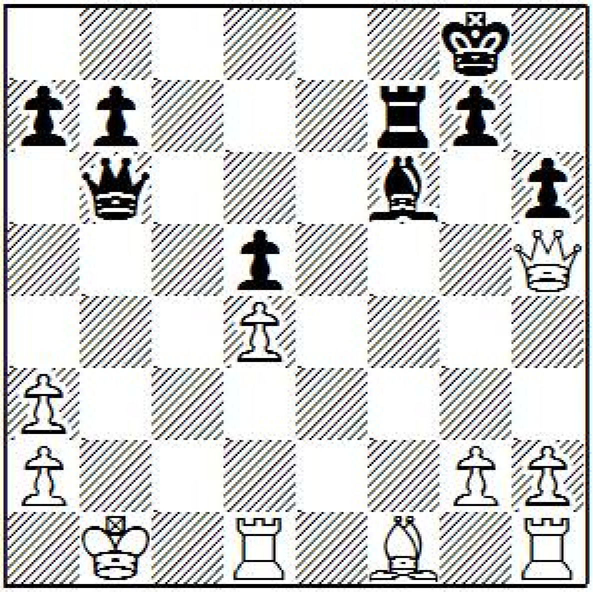


19 exf7+?

The seemingly tempting 19 e7? also fails to disrupt the coordination of the black pieces – 19 ... Re8! (after 19 ... Rc8?? 20 Qf5! the queen returns to the defence) 20 bxa3 Qb6+ 21 Kc2 (21 Ka1 Bxd4+ and ... Rxe7) 21 ... Rc8+ 22 Kd2 Bxd4 and White has no defence: 23 e8Q+ Rxe8 24 Bd3 Qa5+ 25 Kc1 Rc8+ or 23 Ke2 Qe6+ 24 Kf3 Qe3+ 25 Kg4 g6! 26 Qxd5 h5+ with mate.

It also seems hopeless to play 19 bxa3! Qb6+ 20 Kc2 (20 Ka1? Bxd4+ 21 Rxd4 Qxd4+ 22 Kb1 fxe6! 23 Be2 Qe4+ 24 Ka1 Rf2 with a winning attack: 25 Re1 Qd4+ 26 Kb1 Qd2) 20 ... Rc8+ 21 Kd2 Qxd4+ 22 Ke1 (22 Bd3? Rc2+!! 23 Kxc2 Qb2 mate) 22 ... Qc3+, but the e6-pawn serves as a shield for the king and by the sequence 23 Ke2 Qc2+ 24 Rd2 Qe4+ 25 Kd1! (but not instead 25 Kf2? when the continuation is 25 ... Bd4+ 26 Kg3 Rc3+) 25 ... Qb1+ 26 Ke2 or 23 Rd2 Qe3+ (23 ... fxe6 24 Qe2 Bg5 25 Qxe6+ Kh8 26 Qe2 Qa1+) 24 Kd1 Bb2 25 Qxf7+ Kh8 26 Bc4! Rxc4 27 Qf8+ Kh7 28 Qf5+ White gains a draw.

19 ... Rxf7 20 bxa3 Qb6+



21 Bb5!

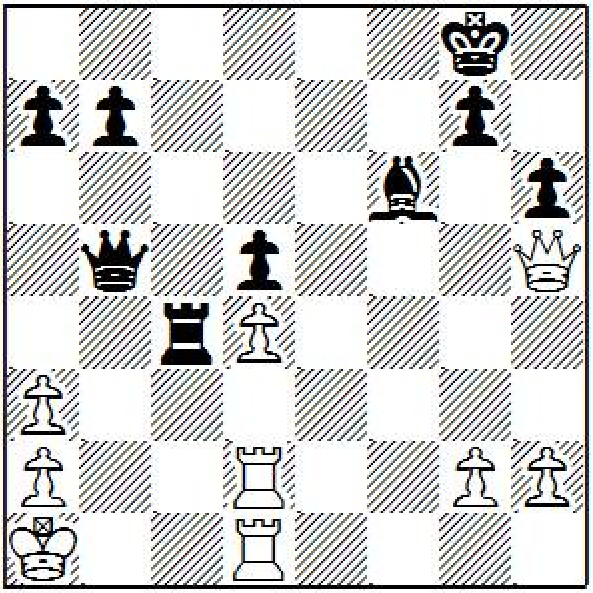
The best chance. Both 21 Ka1 Bxd4+ and 21 Kc2 Rc7+ 22 Kd2 Qxd4+ 23 Ke1 Qc3+! 24 Rd2 Re7+ 25 Be2 Bg5 were hopeless.

21 ... Qxb5+ 22 Ka1 Rc7?

What a pity ... After spending masses of energy and creative effort, Lasker misses a simple win – 22 ... Qc4!, for example: 23 Rd2 Qc3+ or 23 Qg4 Re7! (threatening ... Re4 or ... Re2) 24 Rhe1 Bxd4+ 25 Qxd4 Rxe1 etc.

23 Rd2 Rc4 24 Rhd1?

An error in reply. 24 Qe2?! Qb6! 25 Rhd1 Rxd4 26 Rxd4 Bxd4+ 27 Rxd4 Qxd4+ 28 Kb1 Qe4+ was also poor, but a pretty draw would have resulted from 24 Re1! Qa5! (24 ... Rxd4? 25 Re8+ Kh7 26 Qf5+ g6 27 Qxf6 Qxe8 28 Qxd4 wins for White) 25 Re8+ Kh7 26 Qf5+ g6 27 Re7+!! (27 Qxf6?? Rc1+ 28 Kb2 Qc3 mate) 27 ... Bxe7 28 Qf7+ Kh8 29 Qe8+ Kg7 30 Qe7+ with perpetual.



24 ... Rc3?

Another serious mistake, which was also not pointed out by the commentators. 24 ... Qc6! would have won, for example: 25 Kb1 Bg5 26 Qe2 Bxd2 27 Qxd2 Qd6 etc.

25 Qf5

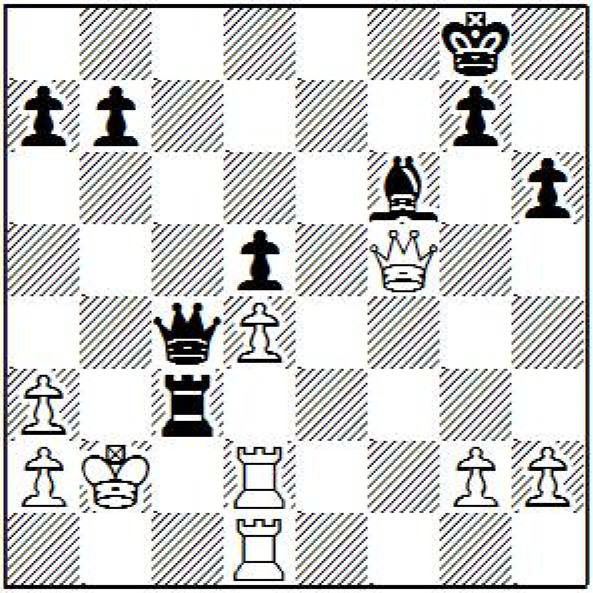
Possible was 25 Re1!? Qc4 (25 ... Kf8? 26 Rf2! and Rxf6+, while after 25 ... Rc8?! White has a clear advantage) 26 Re8+ Kh7 27 Qf5+ g6 28 Re7+!, forcing a draw: 28 ... Bg7 29 Rxg7+ Kxg7 30 Qd7+ Kg8 (but not 30 ... Kf6? 31 Rf2+ Kg5 32 Qe7+ etc.) or 28 ... Bxe7 29 Qf7+ Kh8 30 Qe8+.

25 ... Qc4

25 ... Rxa3?! 26 Qc8+ Kf7 27 Rb2 was unclear.

26 Kb2?

Lasker’s time-trouble haste had upset Pillsbury’s equanimity: he sensed that his opponent had lost the thread of the game and ... he grew nervous. And yet 26 Kb1! (26 Qf1?! Qa4; 26 Qb1 Rxa3 27 Qb2 Rc3 28 Kb1 b5 is level) 26 ... Rxa3 27 Rc1! (previously they considered only the insipid 27 Qc2 Rc3 28 Qb2 b5! 29 Rc2! Bxd4 30 Rxc3 Bxc3) would have set Black unpleasant problems: 27 ... Qb5+ (27 ... Rc3? 28 Rxc3 Qxc3 29 Qxd5+ Kh8 30 Rd1) 28 Ka1 Qa5 29 Rc8+ Kf7 30 Rb2, when it is now White who has an attack. A couple of accurate moves – and chess history could have taken a different course ...

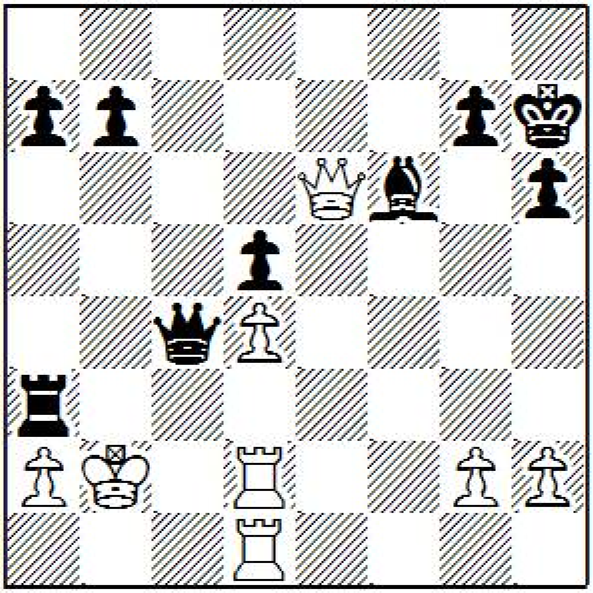


26 ... Rxa3!!

This is some kind of mysticism: the second rook is also sacrificed on the very same square! I think that Pillsbury must have been unable to believe his eyes ...

27 Qe6+ Kh7?

27 ... Kh8 would have won cleanly – 28 Qe8+ (28 Kb1 Bxd4) 28 ... Kh7 29 Kb1 (29 Kxa3? Qc3+ 30 Ka4 a6) 29 ... Bxd4 30 Qe2 Qb4+ 31 Rb2 Bxb2 32 Qxb2 Qe4+ 33 Ka1 Ra4 etc.



28 Kxa3??

Worn out by Black’s ferocious onslaught, Pillsbury walks into a mate. Also bad was 28 Kb1? Bxd4! 29 Qf5+ g6! 30 Qd7+ Bg7. But for some reason no one has pointed out the saving 28 Qf5+! Kh8 29 Kb1!, for example: 29 ... Rxa2! (29 ... Bxd4 30 Qf8+ and Qxa3) 30 Rxa2 Qb3+ 31 Kc1 Bg5+ (31 ... Qxa2 32 Qc8+ Kh7 33 Qc2+) 32 Rad2 Qc3+ 33 Qc2 Qa1+ 34 Qb1 Qc3+ with perpetual check.

28 ... Qc3+ 29 Ka4 b5+! (the final point) **30 Kxb5 Qc4+ 31 Ka5 Bd8+**

In view of 32 Qb6 Bxb6 mate White resigned. Later Lasker called this game the best of his career.

A tremendous human drama, which was also of historic importance! That day Caissa chose Lasker – and, as we now know, the chess goddess was not mistaken. Her cruel whim influenced the fate of both of these great players.

Pillsbury was so broken-hearted that he suffered a further five defeats(!) and in the end did not even take second place. According to some sources, it was then that he began to show the first signs of the illness that ten years later was to send him to his grave. It was written that a sudden diagnosis, supplied the very day before this fatal game, shocked the young master. At any event, he himself complained of serious headaches, sleeplessness and neurosis, due to which several of his games were moved to different days ...

But the inspired champion convincingly won both the match-tournament (1. Lasker 11½ out of 18; 2. Steinitz – 9½; 3. Pillsbury 8; 4. Chigorin – 7), and the super-tournament Nuremberg 1896 (1. Lasker – 13½ out of 18; 2. Maróczy 12½; 3-4. Pillsbury and Tarrasch – 12; 5. Janowski – 11½; 6. Steinitz – 11), and then also the return match with Steinitz (Moscow 1896/97) with a score of +10 -2 =5 – and he held the crown for a further quarter of a century!

Who knows for how long Pillsbury suffered that tragic day in St Petersburg, remembering his missed chances. Later, as one of the historians aptly put it, he spent his remaining life unsuccessfully trying to catch up with the Pillsbury of 1895 – and he was unable to do so: he was trying to catch himself, while Lasker was moving forward ...

Six months later in Nuremberg he again finished behind Lasker, although he gained brilliant revenge in their individual game, receiving a special prize from Rothschild for his fine win over the champion. And eight years later in Cambridge Springs, although already in far from his best form, he found in himself the strength for a final upsurge of chess thought.

Game 42

H.Pillsbury-Em.Lasker

Cambridge Springs 1904

Queen's Gambit D50

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 c5 5 Bg5 cxd4 6 Qxd4 Nc6 (6 ... Be7!?) **7 Bxf6!**

A new move, which had awaited its hour for many years.

7 ... gxf6

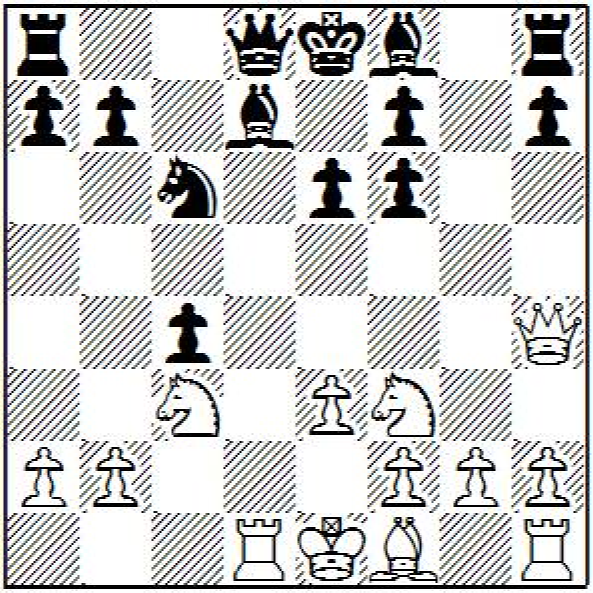
It transpires that White is better after 7 ... Nxd4 8 Bxd8 Nc2+ (8 ... Nxf3+ 9 gxf3 Kxd8 10 cxd5 exd5 11 0-0-0 or immediately 11 Nxd5 with an extra pawn) 9 Kd2 Nxa1 10 Bc7 (10 Bh4 Bd6 11 e3) 10 ... dxc4 11 e4 Nb3+ 12 axb3 cxb3 13 Bc4 etc.

8 Qh4 dxc4 (8 ... d4?! 9 0-0-0! e5 10 e3) **9 Rd1!?**

If 9 Qxc4, then 9 ... Qb6 is good, while if 9 e3 – 9 ... f5 10 Qxd8+ Nxd8 11 Bxc4 Nc6 12 Bb5 Bd7 13 Ke2 a6 14 Bxc6 Bxc6 15 Rhd1 Bg7 16 Rac1 Ke7 17 g3 Rhd8 is equal (Bogoljubow-Alekhine, Munich 1942).

9 ... Bd7 10 e3

The critical position of the variation.



10 ... Ne5?!

Lasker falters! Later he recommended 10 ... f5, for example: 11 Qg3 h5 (11 ... Qb6!?) 12 Bxc4 h4 13 Qf4 Rg8 14 Ne5 Nxe5 15 Qxe5 Bg7!? (15 ... a6 16 0-0 Rc8 is level) 16 Qd6 Bxc3+ 17 bxc3 Rxg2 18 Qb4 Qb6 with a comfortable game, or 11 Qxc4 Bg7 12 Qb3 Bxc3+ 13 Qxc3 Qa5 14 Qxa5 Nxa5 15 Ne5 Ba4 16 Rd4 Nc6 17 Rxa4 Nxe5 18 Bb5+ Ke7 with equal chances (Duz-Khotimirsky-Znosko-Borovsky, St Petersburg 1905).

Euwe suggested 10 ... Be7. After 11 Bxc4 Qa5 12 0-0 f5 13 Qf4 0-0-0 and ... Rhg8-g6 Black has clear counterplay (Fuster-Cuellar, Havana 1966).

11 Nxe5

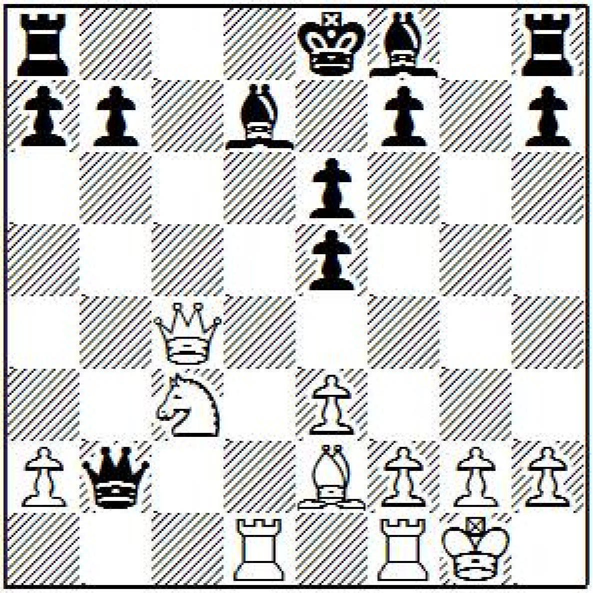
After 11 Be2?! Rc8 12 Nxe5 fxe5 13 Qg3 Qa5 there is no real compensation for the pawn (Guimard-Grau, Argentina 1938).

11 ... fxe5 12 Qxc4 Qb6 13 Be2!

A bold and fully justified pawn sacrifice. White quickly completes his development and throws all his forces against the enemy king. Much more passive was 13 Rd2 Bc6.

13 ... Qxb2 14 0-0!

14 Bh5 Rc8! 15 Bxf7+ Kxf7 16 Rxd7+ Be7 17 Nd1 Rxc4 18 Nxb2 Rc1+ 19 Nd1 Rd8 was unclear.



14 ... Rc8 15 Qd3 Rc7 (if 15 ... Bc6, then 16 Bf3) **16 Ne4 Be7**

Another defensive try was 16 ... Qc2!? 17 Nd6+ Bxd6 18 Qxd6 Qc5.

17 Nd6+

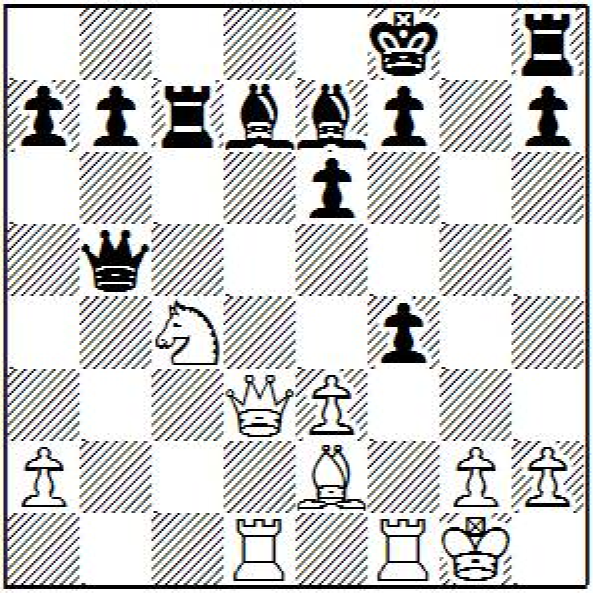
Inadequate was 17 Rd2 Qb6 18 Rb1 Qc6 19 Bf3 Qa6! 20 Qxa6 bxa6 with a tenable endgame.

17 ... Kf8

‘After 17 ... Bxd6 18 Qxd6 Qb6 (18 ... Qc3? 19 Bb5!) 19 Qxe5 Black’s position is catastrophic: 19 ... Rg8 (19 ... 0-0 20 Rb1 or 20 Qg5+!? Kh8 21 Qf6+ Kg8 22 Rd4 e5 23 Qxe5) 20 Rd6 Qc5 21 Qxc5 Rxc5 22 Rfd1 Rc7? 23 Rxd7 Rxd7 24 Bb5.’ (B. Vainstein) However, 22 ... Ba4! is stronger, and therefore White should play 20 Bh5! Qc6 21 e4 with an attack (bad is 21 ... Qc5? 22 Bxf7+ Kxf7 23 Rxd7+).

18 Nc4 Qb5 19 f4! exf4?

Far more solid was 19 ... Bc6 20 fxe5 (20 Nxe5?! Qxd3 21 Bxd3 Bc5!) 20 ... Qd5 21 Qxd5 Bxd5 22 Nd6 Bxd6 23 exd6 Rc2 24 Bf3, when White has only a minimal advantage.



20 Qd4! f6 (if 20 ... Rg8 or 20 ... Kg8, then also 21 Qxf4) **21 Qxf4 Qc5**

But not 21 ... Rc8 22 Qd4 Bc6 23 Rxf6+!

22 Ne5 Be8 23 Ng4

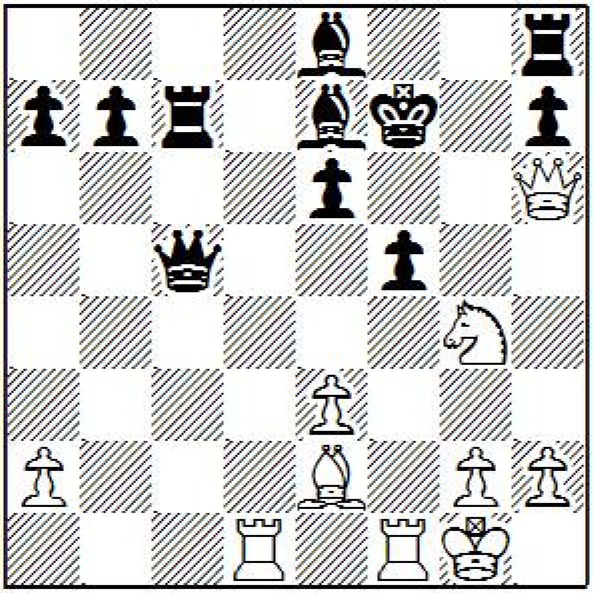
23 Rd4 was also interesting, for example: 23 ... Rg8 24 Rc4 Qd5 25 Bf3 Qxe5 26 Qxe5 Rxc4 27 Qxe6 or 23 ... Kg7 24 Ng4 e5 25 Qh6+ Kg8 26 Bc4+ and wins.

23 ... f5

In view of what follows, more tenacious was 23 ... Bg6! 24 Nxf6 (24 Rd4 Rc6 25 Nxf6 Kg7 26 Nd7 Qg5) 24 ... Kg7 25 Nd7 Qc3 26 Bg4 with an attacking position for White.

24 Qh6+ Kf7

The culmination of this gripping duel.



25 Bc4!!

The right way! 25 Rxf5+ Qxf5 (25 ... exf5? 26 Bc4+! Qxc4 27 Ne5+ and Nxc4) 26 Rf1 Rc5! was unclear.

25 ... Rc6 (25 ... Qxc4? 26 Ne5+) **26 Rxf5+! Qxf5 27 Rf1 Qxf1+** (or 27 ... Rxc4 28 Rxf5+ exf5 29 Ne5+) **28 Kxf1 Bd7 29 Qh5+ Kf8 30 Ne5 1-0**

A fine portrait of the ‘American meteor’ was painted many years later by Alekhine: ‘Pillsbury was, after Morphy, undoubtedly the greatest chess talent of the USA. However, their careers were completely different: whereas Morphy slowly, quietly and joylessly extinguished the candle of his life, Pillsbury aspired for the candle of his life to burn constantly at both ends. “Wine, women and not harmless songs, but strong cigars” – this was Pillsbury’s principle of life. And this together with simultaneous blindfold displays, playing whist, and again blindfold games of draughts ... ’

Indeed something has to be said about Pillsbury’s sensational displays without looking at the board. He toured the whole world giving them, playing in excess of a thousand ‘blindfold’ games in more than seventy displays! He held the world record at that time, established in 1902 in Moscow – 22 boards (+17 -1 =4). This display impressed the nine-year-old Alekhine, who later recalled: ‘Pillsbury’s achievement had a stunning effect on me, as it did on the entire chess world.’ And somewhat earlier a similar display in Havana was observed by the 11-year-old Capablanca – and he also remembered it all his life: ‘Pillsbury staggered everyone with the strength and subtlety of his brilliant play.’

On the other hand, Lasker thought that playing blindfold damaged Pillsbury’s already undermined health, that ‘the struggle of life was made very hard for him,’ and he reproached the chess world for the fact that, ‘it made the meagre prizes it gave him dependent on too much effort and exertion ... ’

In the summer of 1906 a fatal illness ‘announced mate’ to the legendary American. Pillsbury died without reaching the age of 34 and remained as one of the brightest stars ever to sparkle in the chess firmament. The overall score of his dramatic meetings with Lasker was +5 -5 =4, and one can only bitterly regret that they did not in fact play a match for the world crown – a match about which there was much discussion during the transition between the 19th and 20th centuries ...

‘A genius has gone,’ the world champion mourned in his *Lasker’s Chess Magazine* ... ‘Those who knew Pillsbury in his days of early youth will never forget the striking, almost beautiful face which he bore in those days. The eyes had that expression which speaks of mentality, dreaming, poetic sentiment, and righteousness. Some called them angelic. They gave one an idea how the eyes of the old prophets must have looked. His countenance had the stamp of natural nobility. From the long line of his Puritan ancestors he had inherited moral inflexibility, muscles of steel bred by work and a sane life, and a capacity for inspiration that in the olden days might have been religious, but in the modern man spent itself on his one great love, Caissa.’

The Lasker Defence

Thus, after the triumphal year 1896 Lasker became not only the nominal, but also the generally acknowledged chess king. He was distinguished by his phenomenal tenacity, tactical resourcefulness, fine endgame technique and subtle psychological feeling. Some time earlier Schiffers had commented that Lasker ‘has no weak aspects at all and is himself capable of determining and exploiting the opponent’s weak aspect.’

Lasker had an indifferent attitude to the study of opening theory, considering that the main thing was to achieve playable positions. Even so, he devised at least two defences that bear his name: in the Queen’s Gambit (cf. his match with Marshall, 1907) and in the Evans Gambit – here his defensive plan put the ‘opening of the 19th century’ out of action for almost 100 years!

Game 43

M.Chigorin-Em.Lasker

St Petersburg 1895/96, 3rd round

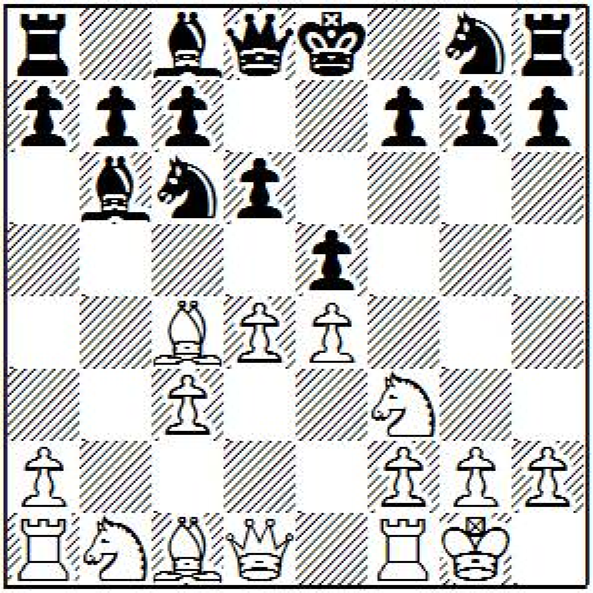
Evans Gambit C52

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bxb4 5 c3 Bc5

For putting the following idea into practice, 5 ... Ba5! is more accurate.

6 0-0 (6 d4!) **6 ... d6! 7 d4 Bb6!**

The value of this move, which was tried back in one of the match games McDonnell-La Bourdonnais (London 1834/35), went unnoticed until Lasker played it.



8 a4

Alas, Mikhail Ivanovich avoids the current 8 dxe5 (in the 20th century 8 Ba3 and 8 h3 were also played) 8 ... dxe5! (8 ... Bg4, 8 ... Be6 and 8 ... Nge7, which have also occurred, are less natural) with two possible continuations:

1) 9 Qxd8+ (9 Nbd2 Qf6 10 Bd5 Nge7 is unfavourable for White and 9 Bxf7+? Kxf7 10 Nxe5+ Ke8! 11 Qh5+ g6 12 Nxg6 Nf6 etc. is altogether incorrect) 9 ... Nxd8 10 Nxe5 Be6, and in view of the weakness of White's queenside pawns, Black has a favourable endgame (Chigorin-Pillsbury, London 1899);

2) 9 Qb3 Qf6 (9 ... Qe7!? 10 Ba3 Qf6) 10 Bg5 (10 Rd1 h6!?; 10 Bb5 h6 or 10 ... Be6 11 Qa4 Bd7) 10 ... Qg6 11 Bd5 (11 Bb5 f6 12 Bh4 Ne7 etc.) 11 ... Nge7 (11 ... f6!? 12 Bxg8 Na5 13 Nxe5 fxe5 14 Qd5 Nc6 is unclear) 12 Bxe7 Kxe7 13 Bxc6 (13 a4?! Na5 14 Qa3+ Qd6 15 Nxe5? Bc5! wins for Black) 13 ... Qxc6 14 Nxe5 Qe6 15 Nc4 (inferior is 15 Nd3 Qxb3 16 axb3 Rd8 17 Nf4 c6 or 15 Qa3+ Qd6! 16 Qxd6+ cxd6). Regarding this, the main variation of the defence, the two players conducted a lively dispute on the pages of the magazines that they edited. Chigorin believed in White's attacking resources, whereas Lasker considered that Black's two bishops and the absence of any weaknesses in his position promised him the advantage – for example, after 15 ... Rd8 16 Qa3+ Ke8.

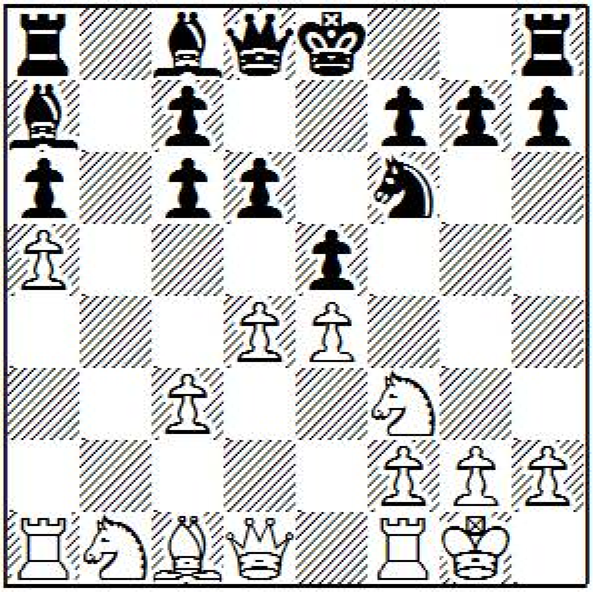
8 ... Nf6

Also sound is 8 ... Bg4 (if 8 ... exd4 – with the idea of 9 cxd4 Bg4 10 Bb2 Qf6 – there can follow the sharp 9 a5!? Nxa5 10 Rxa5 Bxa5 11 Qb3 Qd7 12 e5 d5 13 Bxd5 c6 14 Bc4 b5 15 e6 fxe6 16 Bxe6 Qxe6 17 Re1 Qxe1+ 18 Nxe1 Blackburne-Gunsberg, London 1900) 9 Bb5 Bxf3 10 Qxf3 a6 11 Bxc6+ bxc6 with a good game (Swiderski-Gunsberg, Monte Carlo 1904).

9 Bb5

No better is 9 Bd5 Nxd5 10 exd5 Na5 11 dxe5 0-0!? 12 Bg5 Qd7 13 Re1 dxe5 14 Nxe5 Qf5 15 Bh4 f6 16 Nf3 Bd7 17 Na3 Rae8 (Chigorin-Lipke, Vienna 1898).

9 ... a6 10 Bxc6+ bxc6 11 a5 Ba7



12 dxe5

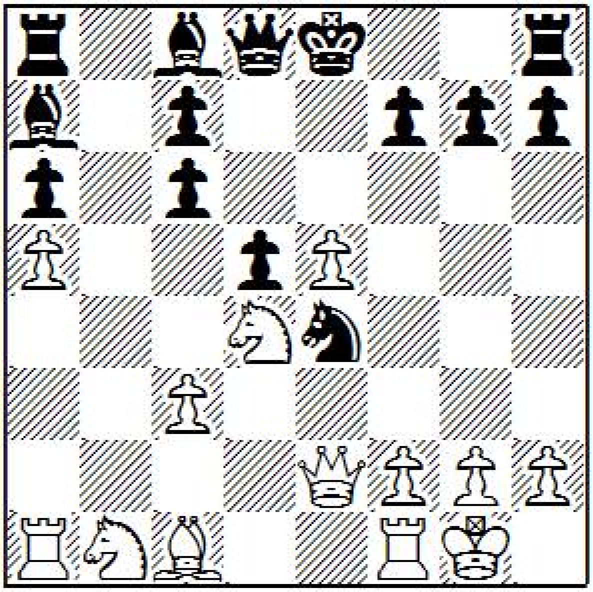
Subsequent attempts to improve White’s play were unsuccessful: 12 Nbd2 exd4 13 cxd4 0-0 14 Qc2 Bd7 15 Bb2 Re8 with a quite healthy extra pawn (Schiffers-Marco, Vienna 1898) or 12 Qa4 exd4! 13 e5?! (not resigning himself to 13 Qxc6+ Bd7 14 Qxa6 Nxe4) 13 ... dxe5 14 Ba3 e4 15 cxd4 Bd7 16 Qc4 c5 17 Ne5 0-0 18 Qxa6 Re8 19 Nxd7 Qxd7 20 dxc5 Bxc5 etc. (Duz-Khotimirsky-Salwe, St Petersburg 1905).

12 ... Nxe4 13 Qe2?

‘White’s planned combination is incorrect and it leads to a lost position. He should have fought for a draw with 13 exd6 0-0! (13 ... cxd6 14 Qe2 d5 15 Nd4 Bxd4 16 cxd4 0-0 17 Nd2 is not dangerous for White; *excuse me: after 17 ... Nd6! he does not have equality – G.K.*) 14 dxc7 Qxc7 15 Qe2 or 13 Qa4 Nc5 14 Qxc6+ Bd7 15 Qd5 0-0 16 exd6 Bb5 17 Rd1 (17 c4?! c6) 17 ... Qxd6 18 Qxd6 cxd6 19 Be3!’ (Zak) However, after 19 ... Rfc8 20 Nh4 Ne4 21 Bxa7 Rxa7 22 f3 Nxc3 23 Nxc3 Rxc3 24 Rxd6 g6 25 f4 Re7 Black would have retained somewhat the better prospects.

13 ... d5 14 Nd4?

Better, even so, was 14 Be3 0-0 (14 ... Bg4 15 Bxa7 Rxa7 16 Qe3 Rb7 17 Nbd2) 15 Bxa7 Rxa7 16 Nd4 Bd7 17 f3 Nc5 18 Nd2 Re8 19 f4 Rb7, although even here things are not easy for White.



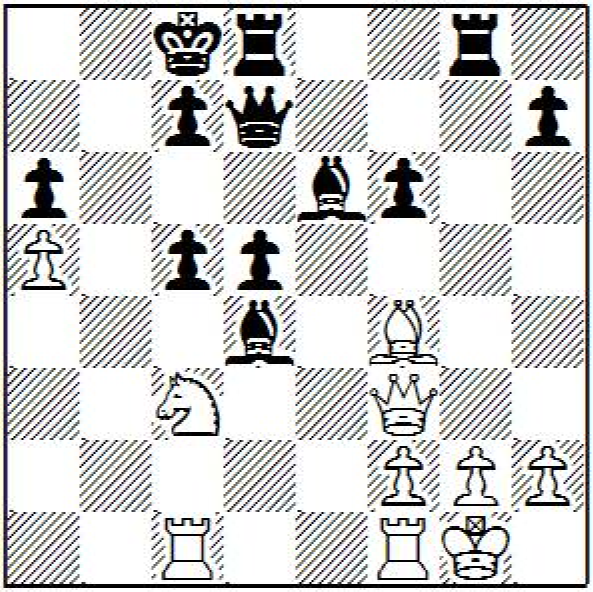
14 ... Nxc3! 15 Nxc3 Bxd4 16 Qd3 (16 Bb2 Rb8 17 Na4 Bxb2 18 Nxb2 c5 is hopeless) **16 ... c5 17 Qg3 Be6! 18 Bg5**

If 18 Qxg7, then 18 ... Kd7! 19 Ra3 Rg8 20 Qxh7 Bxe5 wins.

18 ... Qd7 19 Rac1 f6!

The opening of the g-file is decisive.

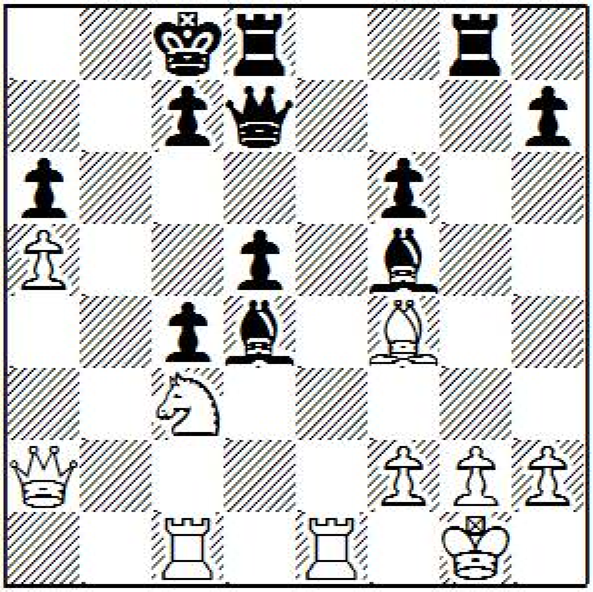
20 exf6 gxf6 21 Bf4 Rg8 22 Qf3 0-0-0



23 Rfe1

If 23 Ne2 possible is either 23 ... Bg4 24 Qd3 c4 25 Qxd4 Bxe2 26 Rfe1 (26 Qa7 Qc6 wins) 26 ... Rxg2+! (but not Zak's 26 ... Qg4 27 g3 Bf3? in view of 28 Qa7! Rg7 29 Rb1) 27 Kxg2 (27 Kh1 Qh3 28 Rc3 Bf3 etc.) 27 ... Qg4+ 28 Bg3 Bf3+ 29 Kg1 Qh3, or 23 ... Bh3! 24 Bg3 (24 Ng3 Qg4 25 Qxg4+ Bxg4 26 Be3 Be5 27 Bxc5 Kd7 28 f4 Bd6 29 Rf2 Rc8 30 Bxd6 Kxd6 31 Rd2 Rge8 32 h3 Bd7 also wins) 24 ... Bg4 25 Qd3 Bxe2 26 Qxe2 c4 27 Rfd1 Rge8 28 Qf3 Qe6 29 Kf1 Ba7 with a won game in each instance.

23 ... c4 24 Qe2 (or 24 Bg3 Bg4 25 Qf4 Be5 and Black wins) **24 ... Bf5 25 Qa2?**



This loses instantly, but 25 Bg3 Bxc3 26 Rxc3 Rde8 27 Qd2 Rxe1+ 28 Qxe1 Bd3 29 Rc1 d4 30 Qd2 Re8 would not have helped, and nor even the best move 25 Qd1! Bd3 26 Bg3 Bxc3.

25 ... Rxg2+! 26 Kh1

Or 26 Kxg2 Bh3+ 27 Kg1 Qg4+ 28 Bg3 Qf3 and mates.

26 ... Rxf2 0-1

The variation with 7 ... Bb6! became known in opening theory as the 'Lasker Defence'.

After confirming his champion's authority, Lasker gave up chess for two and a half years and engaged in a serious study of mathematics and philosophy.

The major chess event of those years was the international tournament in Vienna 1898: 1-2. Tarrasch and Pillsbury – 27½ out of 36; 3. Janowski – 25½; 4. Steinitz – 23½; 5. Schlechter – 21½; 6-7. Burn and Chigorin – 20, etc. By winning the additional match for first prize with a score of 2½-1½, Tarrasch regained the reputation of No.1 challenger. However, instead of trying to obtain a match for the crown, he left the chess stage for four years ...

Lasker’s return was no less triumphal. He won by an enormous margin the tournaments in London 1899 (1. Lasker – 23½ out of 27; 2-4. Maróczy, Pillsbury and Janowski – 19; 5. Schlechter – 18; 6. Blackburne – 16½; 7. Chigorin – 16) and Paris 1900, where the first draws were replayed (1. Lasker – 14½ out of 16; 2. Pillsbury – 12½; 3-4. Maróczy and Marshall – 12; 5. Burn – 11; 6. Chigorin – 10½).

Immediately after the London tournament, Lasker was challenged to a match for the title of world champion for the first time. The challenger was the Franco-Russian master David Janowski (1868-1927), a player of vivid attacking style, who had defeated all the stars, including Lasker himself, many times. Six months before London, on a tour of America, he challenged Pillsbury to a candidates match, but nothing came of this. ‘A great pity,’ the press wrote. ‘A match between the two brilliant young players would have brought the chess world numerous masterpieces.’

Speaking of masterpieces, one involuntarily recalls the opening of the following game, which was well ahead of its time.

Game 44

S.Tarrasch-D.Janowski

Vienna 1898

Sicilian Defence B33

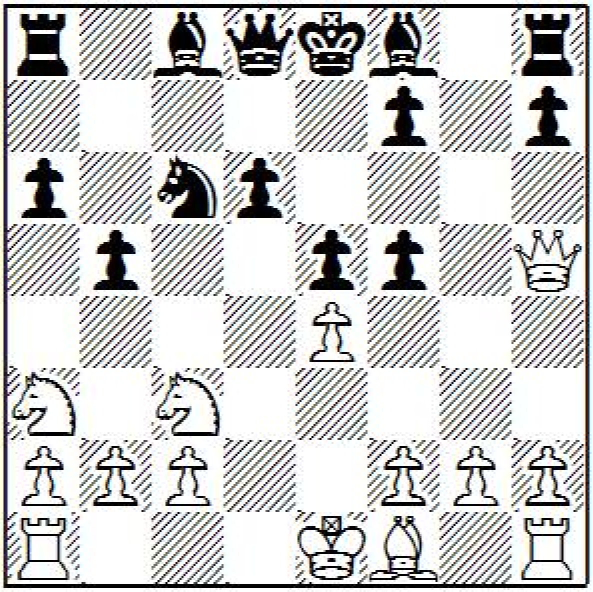
1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 e6 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nf6 6 Ndb5 d6

An audacious challenge by the new school: Tarrasch considered this move to be ... a decisive mistake!

7 Bf4 e5 8 Bg5 a6 9 Bxf6 (more accurate is 9 Na3! b5 – the Sveshnikov or Chelyabinsk Variation!) **9 ... gxf6 10 Na3 f5! 11 Qh5** (11

Bc4 Ra7!) **11 ... b5!**

Just like the second half of the 20th century ...



12 Naxb5!? (getting rid of the 'bad' knight) **12 ... axb5 13 Bxb5 Bb7! 14 Bc4**

Dubious is 14 exf5?! Qa5! or 14 Qxf5?! Bg7 15 0-0-0 0-0 16 Bxc6 Bxc6 17 Rd3 Bd7! 18 Qh5 Be6 (Sveshnikov).

14 ... Qf6 15 Nd5 Qg6 16 Nc7+ Kd8 17 Qxg6 fxg6 18 Nxa8 Bxa8 19 Bd5 Kc7

... and after 20 ... Bh6! (followed by moving the c6-knight) White's rook and two pawns are no stronger than the two minor pieces.

Janowski was then on the rise (slightly later he brilliantly won the tournaments in Monte Carlo 1901 and Hanover 1902), but his dreams of a match with Lasker had to be deferred. The champion devised a new 'defence': first, he proposed playing to the first to win eight games (draws not counting), whereas the obstinate challenger, 'based on the experience of previous matches for the world championship,' insisted on playing to 10 wins; secondly, he demanded a high monetary stake, which Janowski despaired of collecting – it was joked that 'no one wanted to invest money in a hopeless enterprise.' And after lengthy discussions the match did not in fact take place ...

The Indefatigable Marshall

Lasker’s tournament victories brought him legendary fame. ‘Lasker was there, Lasker the first, the only Lasker,’ *Wiener Schachzeitung* summed things up. But the champion continued his deep studies, and in 1900 he defended his doctor’s dissertation on mathematics ... The ‘absolute monarch’ did not play tournament chess for four whole years!

At that time those shining in tournaments were Janowski, Pillsbury, Schlechter and Maróczy. The last three were joint-winners at the 12th Congress of the Germany Chess Union (Munich 1900), with Maroczy being placed third after a play-off. There, incidentally, a highly momentous event occurred: a Union of International Chess Masters was founded at a meeting chaired by Lasker. The first President to be elected was Berger, and second (at a meeting in Monte Carlo 1902) – Dr Tarrasch, and its permanent Secretary was Marco, editor of the magazine *Wiener Schachzeitung*, which became the organ of the Union. And although the activity of this organisation soon faded, even so a historic precedent of an association of chess players, about which Staunton had dreamed long before, had been created.

Returning to the arena, Tarrasch reminded everyone of his formidable strength in Monte Carlo 1903: 1. Tarrasch – 20 out of 26; 2. Maróczy – 19; 3. Pillsbury – 18½; 4. Schlechter – 17 etc. Alas, this tournament was overshadowed by a scandalous incident, which in my view has some historical significance.

‘Chigorin arrived from St Petersburg,’ wrote the press, ‘to experience something incredible: his compatriot, Prince Dadian of Mingrelia, a well-known falsifier of “brilliant” games with unknown players, imagining himself for a few hundred francs to be a chess patron, threatened to resign as president of the tournament committee, if Chigorin, who, it was said, had once offended him, was allowed to play. And the organisers, defending the interests of the gambling-house, and not chess, excluded Chigorin from the tournament.’ An unprecedented matter! But what about the other players? Driven by quite understandable material considerations, they swallowed this pill. Only Janowski, who was not playing in the tournament, was genuinely indignant: ‘Did Dr Tarrasch, President of the Union of International Chess Masters, really not have sufficient authority to prevent this? ... I request that my name be removed from the list of members of the International Union. This decision is final.'

In our days similar 'patrons', trying to put a good face on the matter, act in a more refined way: they tirelessly repeat that their doors are open, and with an obliging smile they invite you to play ... under deliberately unacceptable conditions!

After his victory in Monte Carlo, Tarrasch at last sent a challenge to Lasker, and they even signed an agreement to a match, planned for autumn 1904. But fate decreed otherwise: when out skating the challenger fell and suffered a serious fracture, and there was no question of him playing chess for many months ...

The super-tournament in Cambridge Springs (spring 1904), where Lasker played after a lengthy interval, produced a super-sensation: going through the whole tournament undefeated and scoring 13 points out of 15(!), the winner was the young American Frank James Marshall (1877-1944). This fearless chess cowboy, a lover of inconceivable complications and traps, had distinguished himself back in Paris 1900, by inflicting the only defeat on the champion. And in Cambridge Springs he finished ahead of Lasker and Janowski, who shared second place, by two whole points!

Marshall promptly challenged the champion to a match, but in reply Lasker demanded a stake of not less than $2,000 from each party. 'For what right have I to prefer one challenger to another?' he wrote to the editor of the magazine *Checkmate*. 'Where could I stop in making allowances? If a challenger cannot satisfy the conditions, it is very likely, if not clear, that the chess world does not consider him entitled by his record to challenge the championship, and consequently he ought to challenge somebody else and show first that he is underrated. It would, in the case of Marshall, for instance, not have been difficult to arrange a match between him and Janowski on the terms proposed.'

Later, remembering Steinitz's sad fate, Lasker gave a clear explanation of his high financial demands: 'If the chess world wishes to experience satisfaction, enjoy some excitement and learn from the strongest, that is, obtain everything that will be given to tens of thousands of modern players and to some extent even to future generations by a match for the world championship, why should the chess world not pay for this? After all, the players sacrifice considerable time and health. Why should the chess world expect all these sacrifices from the masters, why does is not create the conditions, when the entire question, essentially, revolves around ... the remuneration!’

In short, Marshall had to play a match with Janowski, who himself was eager for a fight. This ‘candidates match’ (Paris 1905) was won by the American with a score of +8 -5 =4, after which he issued a challenge to ... Tarrasch! The latter immediately accepted the challenge, declaring that he was ‘gladdened by the opportunity to play such an opponent.’ They again played to the first to win eight games (Nuremberg 1905) and Tarrasch demonstrated who was who: +8 -1 =8. He concluded his speech at the final banquet with a proud tirade:

‘After this, my new and greatest achievement, there is no reason to think that in the chess world anyone should be considered higher than me. Indeed: it is far more difficult to beat the young Marshall than the aged Steinitz! I am prepared to play a match with Lasker under acceptable conditions, but I do not intend to challenge him: that should be done by the one who has an inadequate reputation and inadequate successes. My successes over the past 20 years are at least equal to his successes; when two years ago I sent him a challenge, it proved to be in vain. It is a matter for the chess world to arrange this match, if it is of interest ... The German Chess Union and the American clubs should establish acceptable conditions, which would induce us, and if necessary force us to join battle. If the chess world wishes, it will obtain a Lasker-Tarrasch match.’

Meanwhile, Marshall did not calm down: after winning the strong tournament Nuremberg 1906, he again threw down the gauntlet to Lasker! And ... the champion ‘acknowledged defeat,’ by lowering the winner’s prize to $1,000. The challenger’s enthusiastic American supporters gathered the necessary sum and the Lasker-Marshall duel, the first match for the world crown for ten years(!), became a reality. It took place early in 1907 in six USA cities. They played, according to the new fashion, to the first to win eight games. ‘If Marshall wins, will he really be acknowledged as world champion?’ the magazine *Deutsche Schachzeitung* asked in perplexity.

However, Lasker did not give his opponent the slightest chance. Knowing well Marshall’s reckless, excessively optimistic character, he quickly found ‘calming measures’.

Game 45

F.Marshall-Em.Lasker

World Championship, USA 1907, 1st game

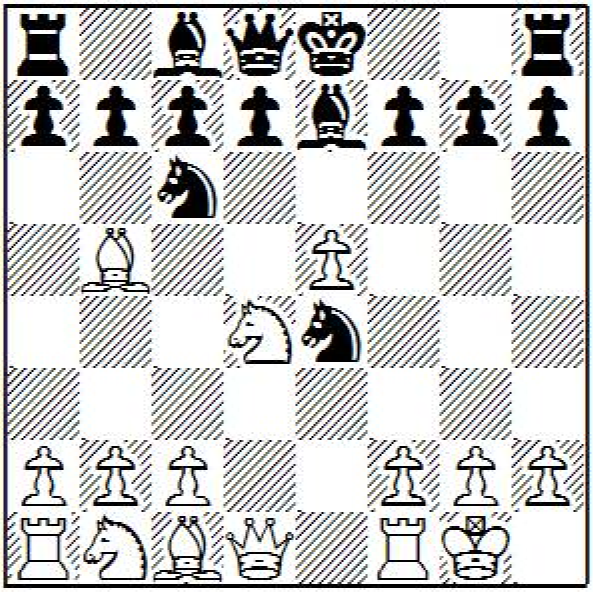
Ruy Lopez C65

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d4 (only 4 0-0 gives chances of an advantage) **4 ... exd4 5 0-0 Be7** (5 ... a6!?) **6 e5**

The alternative is 6 Qe2 (6 Nxd4 0-0 7 Nc3 Re8 equalises Black-Lasker, simultaneous display, USA 1907) 6 ... 0-0 7 e5 Ne8 8 Rd1 d5 9 c3!? (9 Bxc6 bxc6 10 Nxd4 Qd7 is equal Berry-Lasker, simultaneous display, USA 1903) or 6 Re1 0-0 (6 ... d6 7 Nxd4 Bd7 leads to the Steinitz Defence; 6 ... a6!?) 7 e5 Ne8 8 Bf4 with a mini-plus.

6 ... Ne4 7 Nxd4

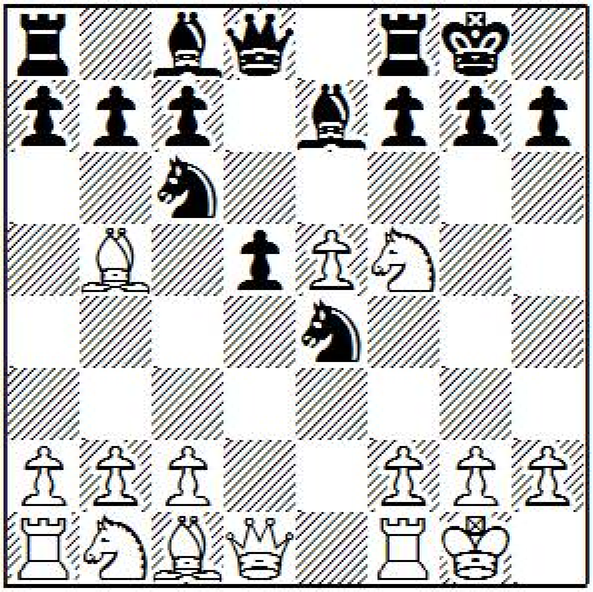
In the game Tal-Furman (25th USSR Championship, Riga 1958) after 7 Qe2 Nc5 8 Rd1 0-0 (8 ... Ne6!?) 9 Bxc6 bxc6 10 Nxd4 Qe8 11 Nc3 f6 12 Nf5 Bd8 13 Qc4+ Ne6 14 Nd4! White retained some initiative.



7 ... 0-0!

Not wasting a tempo on 7 ... Nxd4?! 8 Qxd4 Nc5, which may lead to a rout: 9 f4!? (9 Nc3 is quieter) 9 ... b6? 10 f5! Nb3 11 Qe4! Nxa1 (or 11 ... Bb7 12 Bxd7+! Kf8 13 Qxb7 Nxa1 14 f6) 12 f6! Bc5+ 13 Kh1 Rb8 14 e6 Rg8 15 Qxh7 (Bird-Steinitz, London 1866).

8 Nf5 (an attempt to fight for at least the appearance of an advantage) **8 ... d5**



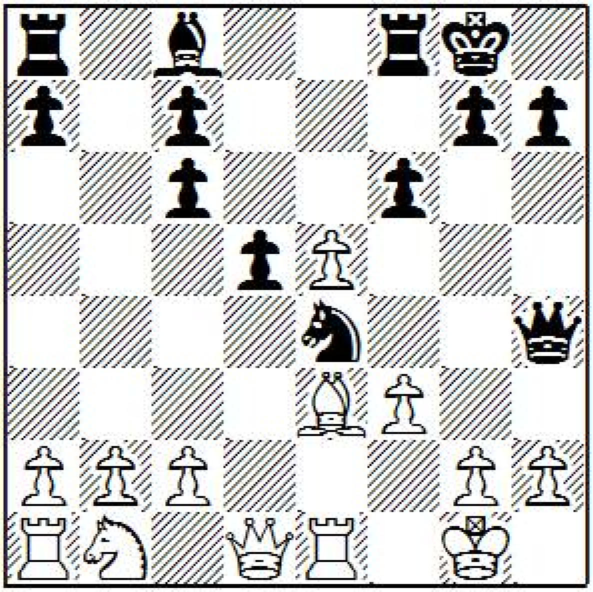
9 Bxc6

As it later transpired, little good also comes of 9 Nxe7+ Nxe7, for example: 10 c3 (10 f3 Nc5 11 b4?! Bd7! 12 Be2 Na4) 10 ... c6 11 Be2 Ng6 12 f3 Nc5 13 b4 Nd7 14 f4 Re8 15 Nd2 Ndf8 16 Nb3 Bf5 17 Nc5 Rb8 18 g4 Bc8 19 Be3 f6 with equal chances (Spielmann-Eliskases, Linz 1932).

9 ... bxc6 10 Nxe7+ Qxe7 11 Re1 Qh4!?

‘In search of complications Black avoids 11 ... f6, which leads to a good position: 12 f3 Ng5 13 Bxg5 fxg5 14 Nc3 Be6 followed by ... c6-c5.’ (Zak)

12 Be3 (the immediate 12 f3!? would perhaps have been better) **12 ... f6 13 f3**



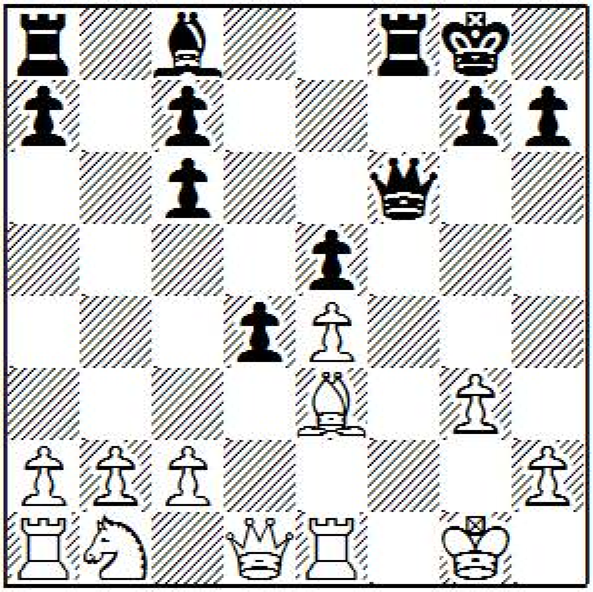
13 ... fxe5!

13 ... Ng5 was more prudent, but Lasker makes a psychologically wise choice. It is doubtful whether the world champion calculated all the variations; he more probably sensed that the character of the positions arising after the piece sacrifice would be quite comfortable for him, and that for Marshall they would be unpleasant.

14 fxe4 d4 15 g3?!

And Lasker guessed correctly! Of course, White could not move his bishop: 15 Bd2? (or 15 Bc1? Qf2+ 16 Kh1 Bg4) 15 ... Bg4 16 Qc1 Rf2! 17 Bg5 Rxg2+! 18 Kxg2 Bh3+ 19 Kh1 Qf2 and mate. But 15 Qd2! dxe3 16 Qxe3 (and Nd2!) would have retained at least equal chances – here the best would seem to be 16 ... Rf6 17 Nd2 Bg4, not allowing the knight to go to f3.

15 ... Qf6



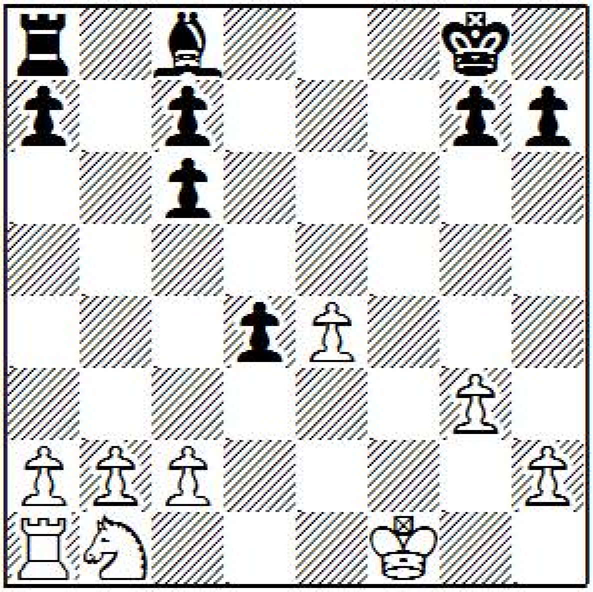
16 Bxd4?!

Again what tells is Lasker’s knowledge of human nature: Marshall does not want to ‘sit’ under an attack after 16 Bd2 (16 Qd2?! dxe3 17 Qxe3 Bh3! is no longer so attractive) 16 ... Qf2+ 17 Kh1 Bh3 18 Rg1. After this, in Zak’s opinion, ‘there would have followed 18 ... h5, and White is helpless against the threat of ... Bg4, since if 19 Qxh5? or 19 Be1? Black gives mate in two moves: 19 ... Qxg1+ 20 Kxg1 Rf1 mate.’ (Réti). Here there is some oversight, since 19 Na3 Bg4 20 Rf1! Bxd1 21 Rxf2 Rxf2 22 Rxd1 is bad not for White, but for Black. Therefore correct is 18 ... Bf1! (threatening ... Be2-f3) 19 Be1 Qe3 20 Nd2 Be2 21 Qc1 Bf3+ 22 Nxf3 Qxf3+ 23 Rg2 Qf1+ with not more than perpetual check.

16 ... exd4 17 Rf1 Qxf1+!

There is no point in either 17 ... Qe5 18 Rxf8+ Kxf8 19 Qf3+ Ke7 20 Qf4, or 17 ... Qe7 18 Rxf8+ Qxf8 19 Qxd4 Bh3 20 Nc3 Rd8 21 Qe3 Rd6 22 Ne2 and Nf4.

18 Qxf1 Rxf1+ 19 Kxf1



When he avoided the dangerous 16 Bd2 Marshall probably considered this ending to be drawn, but Lasker is of another opinion.

19 ... Rb8! 20 b3 Rb5!

In this game the rook truly performs miracles.

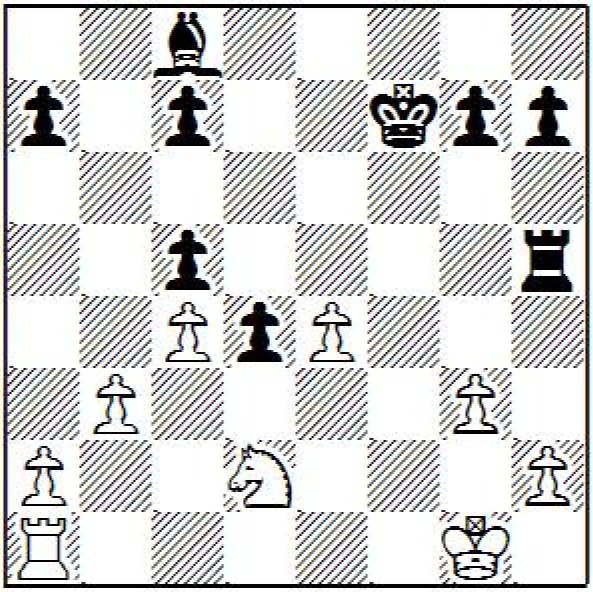
21 c4

One can understand the desire to get rid of the weak c2-pawn, but 21 Nd2 (not 21 c3? Re5 or 21 Na3? Re5 22 Re1 Ra5; also dubious is 21 a4 Rc5 22 Na3 Bg4 23 Kg2 Rc3 24 Rf1 d3 etc.) would have enabled White, although not without difficulty, to gain the desired draw:

1) 21 ... Rc5 22 Rc1 Ba6+ 23 Kf2 (23 Ke1? Rc3!) 23 ... Bd3 (23 ... Rc3 24 Nb1!) 24 Nf3 Rxc2+ 25 Rxc2 Bxc2 26 Nxd4 Bxe4 27 Ne6 Bb1 28 a3 Ba2 29 Nc5;

2) 21 ... Rh5 22 h4 (22 Kg2?! Rc5! 23 Rc1 Rc3; 22 Kg1 Kf7, and, according to Zak, ‘the king begins a decisive invasion’) 22 ... Rc5 23 Nf3 Rxc2 24 Nxd4 Bh3+ 25 Ke1 Rg2 26 Rc1 Rxg3 27 Rxc6 Rg4 28 Nf3! Rxe4+ 29 Kf2 Re7 30 Ra6 c5 31 Rc6.

21 ... Rh5! 22 Kg1 (after 22 h4? g5! 23 hxg5 Rh1+ the rook paralyses both white pieces) **22 ... c5 23 Nd2 Kf7**



24 Rf1+?

The decisive positional mistake: Marshall’s imagination dries up in the desert of the endgame! Essential was the active 24 a3! a5 (24 ... Ke7 25 b4; if 24 ... Ke6, then not 25 b4?! Ke5! 26 bxc5 d3, but first 25 Rf1! Shereshevsky) 25 Rb1! Ke7 (25 ... Ke6 26 b4 axb4 27 axb4 Ke5 28 bxc5 d3 29 Rb8 Be6 30 Rd8) 26 b4 cxb4 27 axb4 axb4 (or 27 ... Be6 28 bxa5 Rxa5 29 Nb3) 28 Rxb4 Ra5 29 Nb3 Ra2 30 Rb8 Bh3 31 Nxd4 with sufficient counterplay for a draw.

24 ... Ke7 25 a3?! (alas, this activity is too late) **25 ... Rh6!** (the rook is on the alert!) **26 h4**

If 26 b4, then 26 ... Ra6! 27 Rf3 (27 bxc5 Rxa3 28 Nf3 Bh3 wins for Black) 27 ... Bg4 28 Rb3 Bd1 29 Rb1 Bc2 30 Rc1 d3 etc. And if 26 Ra1, then 26 ... a5 27 h4 Bg4 28 Rf1 Rb6!? is good.

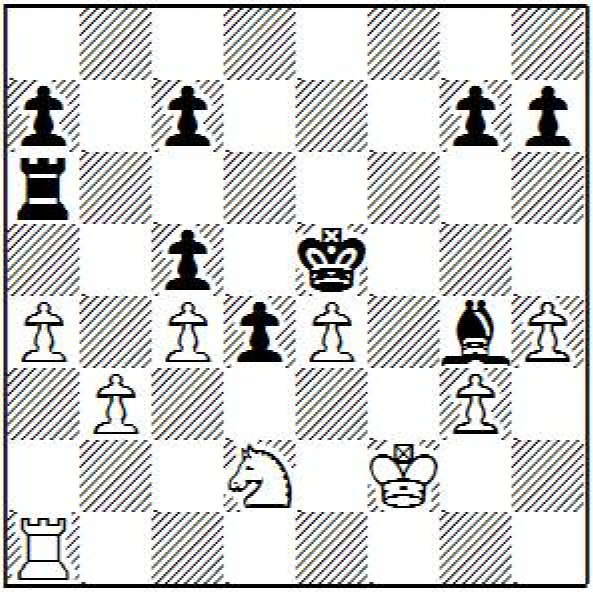
26 ... Ra6!

As a result of the impressive manoeuvre ... Rb8-b5-h5-h6-a6 Black has an enormous advantage.

27 Ra1

27 a4 was hardly much better, for example: 27 ... Bg4 28 Rf4 h5 29 Kf2 Rb6! (29 ... Ke6 30 Nf3 is not so clear) 30 Ke1 a5 31 Kf2 Rb8 (31 ... g6!?) 32 Ke1 Ke6, preparing to break through with ... d4-d3 and ... Ke5-d4.

27 ... Bg4! 28 Kf2 Ke6 29 a4 (the rook ending after 29 Nf3 Bxf3 30 Kxf3 Ke5 is also bad) **29 ... Ke5**



An amazing picture: only ten simple moves – and White's position is in ruins!

30 Kg2 Rf6 31 Re1 d3 32 Rf1 Kd4

Alas, the heroic rook will not be present to witness Black's triumph ...

33 Rxf6 gxf6 34 Kf2 c6 35 a5 (or 35 Nb1 a5 36 Ke1 Kxe4 37 Kf2 Kd4) **35 ... a6**

Zugzwang! The rest is clear without any commentary:

36 Nb1 Kxe4 37 Ke1 Be2 38 Nd2+ (38 Kd2 f5) **38 ... Ke3 39 Nb1 f5 40 Nd2 h5 41 Nb1 Kf3 42 Nc3 Kxg3 43 Na4 f4 44 Nxc5 f3 45 Ne4+ Kf4 46 Nd6 c5 47 b4 cxb4 48 c5 b3 49 Nc4 Kg3 50 Ne3 b2 0-1**

After this Marshall switched to 1 d4, hoping to successfully employ Pillsbury's favourite attack in the Queen's Gambit. But he received in reply 1 ... d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e3 Ne4!? – another 'Lasker Defence' (later improved by 5 ... 0-0 6 Nf3 h6 7 Bh4 Ne4). In this new way Black won the third game and also the last, the 15th.

The final score of the match, +8 =7 in favour of the champion, indicates that the two players were simply in a different class. Although, for a good 20 years more the challenger was to be one of the best grandmasters in the world, he was known as the 'Don Quixote of chess', and on one occasion, in a game with Lewitzky (Breslau 1912), he landed the inimitable blow 23 ... Qg3!!, which has been called ‘the most brilliant move in chess history’.

Lasker demonstrated his absolute superiority over Marshall, but it was clear to everyone that the real challenger was Tarrasch. This was confirmed by the four-cycle ‘tournament of champions’ in Ostend 1907: 1. Tarrasch – 12½ out of 20; 2. Schlechter – 12; 3-4. Marshall and Janowski – 11½ etc.

Who are you, Doctor Tarrasch?

After the tournament in Cambridge Springs the world champion remained living in America, where he published his splendid *Lasker's Chess Magazine*. However, four years later the magazine closed due to lack of funds, and Dr Lasker returned to his native Germany. Awaiting him there was his old and implacable opponent – Dr Siegbert Tarrasch (1862-1934).

We have already spoken about the role played by Tarrasch, one of the strongest players since the early 1890s. He was born and grew up in Breslau, the town of Anderssen and Zukertort, where several other masters also lived: Harrwitz, von Scheve, Riemann and Schottländer. It is symbolic that Siegbert attended the same school that Anderssen himself had once done. ‘I saw the ageing master only once, admiringly observing his play from a respectful distance,’ writes Tarrasch. ‘The chess king did not pamper his subjects, only occasionally commanding Riemann or Schottländer to play a game with him.’ But the youngster played constantly against masters, he studied the books of Philidor, Stamma, von der Lasa and the *Handbuch* of Dufresne and Zukertort, and his chess strength together with his erudition very quickly grew.

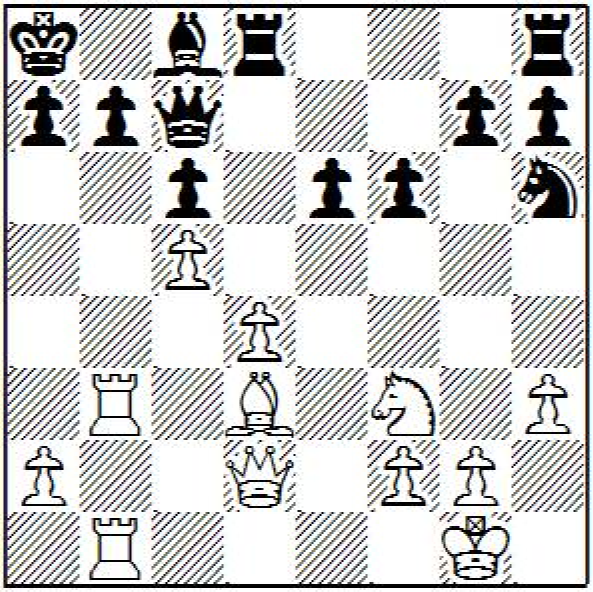
It is not surprising that it was Tarrasch who properly appreciated the ideas of the first world champion and became the first who was able to take Steinitz's teaching to a wide audience in a popular form, being essentially the mentor of more than one generation of masters (he was even called the ‘teacher of Germany’). This was an important, necessary stage in the development of chess: so that later, in the first quarter of the 20th century, the world should see the appearance of Rubinstein, Alekhine and the hypermodernists, Steinitz's lessons had to be assimilated first!

From the enormous heritage of Dr Tarrasch, apart his games with Chigorin and Lasker given in the book, we have selected a few more striking examples of his play.

Game 46

S.Tarrasch-I.Gunsberg

Fifth congress of the German Chess Union, Frankfurt 1887



This position was reached from a French Defence with 3 ... dxe4, a move criticised by Tarrasch, but the player with the black pieces was not some boy off the street, but the winner of the Fourth Congress and a future challenger for the world crown, a match opponent of Chigorin and Steinitz. Nevertheless White has boldly sacrificed his b-pawn, to create a direct attack on the king.

22 Rb6!

Tarrasch also considered the unexpected 22 Ba6?! bxa6? 23 Qa5! Qf4 24 g3 winning, but rejected it in view of any neutral reply by Black – for example: 22 ... Rhe8, and nothing is achieved by 23 Rxb7 Bxb7 24 Bxb7+ Qxb7 25 Rxb7 Kxb7 etc.

22 ... e5!

A timely counter in the centre. 22 ... Ng8 (22 ... axb6? 23 cxb6 and Qa5+) 23 R1b4 Ne7 and ... Nd5 was more passive.

23 R1b4 Rhe8

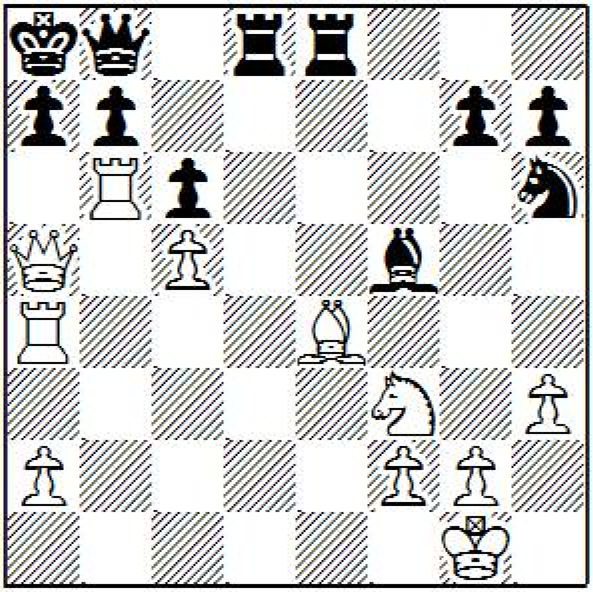
Bad once again was 23 ... axb6? 24 cxb6, and after the queen moves – 25 Ra4+ Kb8 26 Ra8+! Kxa8 27 Qa5+ Kb8 28 Qa7 mate.

24 dxe5 fxe5 25 Ra4 e4

Black could have considered 25 ... Qb8!? 26 Qc3 (26 Ng5 Bf5 27 Ne4 Bxe4 28 Rxe4 Nf5 or 28 ... Ng8) 26 ... Nf5 27 Be4 Nd4 28 Nxd4 exd4 29 Rxd4 Rxd4 30 Qxd4 Qf4, forcing 31 Rb4 (Neishtadt).

26 Qa5 Qb8 27 Bxe4 Bf5?

‘An extremely rash move, which loses. After 27 ... Rd1+! 28 Ne1 Nf5 the knight, which for a long time has been standing idle, would have come into play, and the chances would have been roughly equal.’ (Tarrasch)



28 Ra6!

A pretty stroke, which involuntarily brings the words of Fischer to mind: ‘Tarrasch's play was razor-sharp, and in spite of his devotion to this supposedly scientific method of play, his game was often witty and bright.’

28 ... Rd1+

This is forced (28 ... bxa6? 29 Bxc6+), but it also fails to save Black. When playing 28 Ra6!, White had to calculate a lengthy forced variation:

29 Ne1 Rxe1+ 30 Qxe1 Bxe4 31 Rxe4 Rxe4 32 Qxe4 bxa6 33 Qxc6+ Qb7 34 Qe8+ Qb8 35 Qe4+ Qb7 36 c6! Qc7 37 Qe8+ Qb8 38 Qd7!

An elegant ‘quiet’ move. The helpless knight on h6 illustrates Tarrasch’s famous aphorism: a knight on the edge of the board stands badly!

38 ... Qb1+ 39 Kh2 Nf5 40 c7 1-0

When studying the following classic game, it is interesting to compare Tarrasch’s comments and those of his eternal critic Nimzowitsch, who in this case was very satisfied with the play of his old colleague.

Game 47

M.Harmonist-S.Tarrasch

Sixth Congress of the German Chess Union, Breslau 1889

Ruy Lopez C67

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6!?

Tarrasch willingly made this move, regarding it (compared with 5 ... Be7 – *Game No.55*) as ‘the simplest defence, leading to an equal game.’ Later it was successfully played by Pillsbury, then from the mid-1970s by Romanishin, and nowadays the baton has been taken up by Kramnik.

The present game, effectively the original source of a fashionable variation, disclosed many of its basic ideas for Black.

6 Bxc6

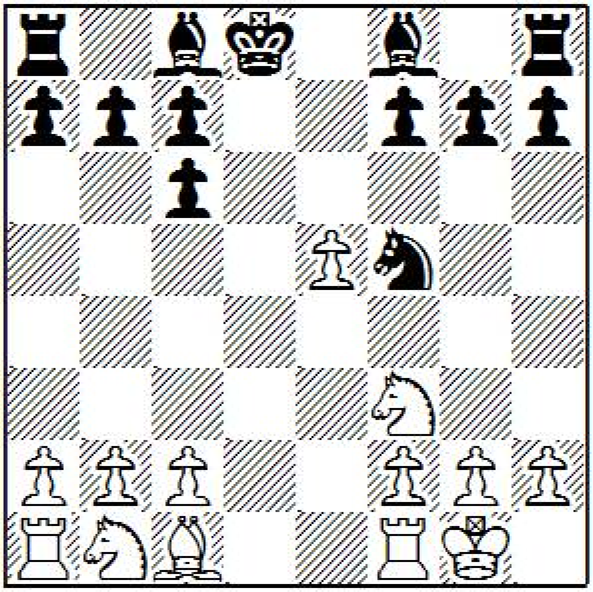
With White the Doctor himself also tried 6 dxe5 Nxb5 7 a4 d6 (7 ... .Nbd4!?) 8 axb5 Nxe5 9 Re1 Be7 10 Nxe5 dxe5 11 Qxd8+ Kxd8 12 Rxe5 Bd6 with equality or the sharp Janowski Attack 8 e6!? fxe6 9 axb5 Ne7 etc.

6 ... dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8

One of the *tabiyas* of the Berlin Defence, nicknamed, on account of it being so hard to breach, the ‘Berlin Wall’. The resources of this complex endgame were underestimated for a long time, until it was played by Kramnik in the London 2000 world championship match.

‘Although Black temporarily experiences difficulties in view of the loss of castling, in the endgame, thanks to his two bishops and pawn majority on the queenside, he gains good winning chances.’ (Tarrasch)

Moreover, compared with sharp set-ups, here the value of each move is not so great and Black can vary his ways of defending.



The position contains numerous nuances and it is very difficult to find the correct line of play for White. For the moment one thing is clear: he has a certain number of useful moves (such as Nc3 and h2-h3), but after that everyone plays how he wishes. In the 21st century it would appear that White is gradually finding some ways, although it is a lengthy, painful and far from obvious process. In short, at the present day the variation is still alive.

9 Bg5+?!

A waste of a tempo: in any case the black king has to move from d8. More logical is 9 Nc3 h6 with the following possibilities:

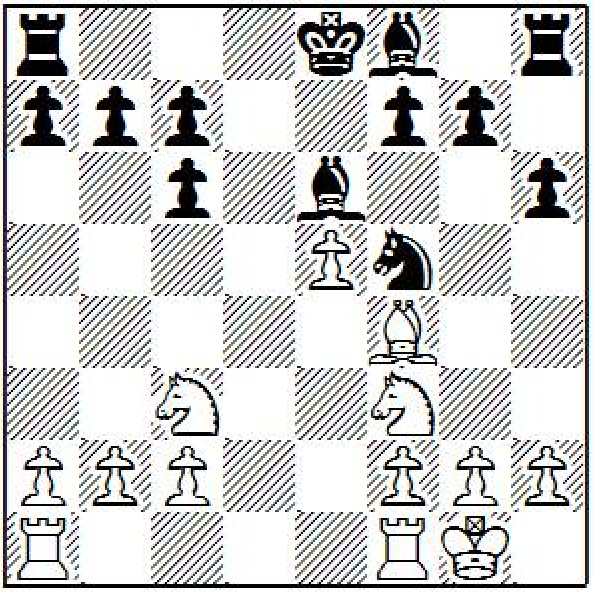
1) 10 b3 (10 Bd2 Be6 11 Ne2 c5 12 Bc3 is also unclear, Tarrasch-Lasker, Hastings 1895) 10 ... Be6 11 Bb2 Be7 (11 ... Kc8!? Romanishin) 12 Rad1+ Kc8 13 Rfe1?! (13 Ne2!) 13 ... g5! 14 Ne4 b6?! (14 ... Re8) 15 Nd4? (15 Nd6+! Bxd6 is level) 15 ... Nxd4 16 Rxd4 Kb7 17 Nf6 a5 18 a4 c5 19 Rd3 c4 20 bxc4 Bxc4 21 Rd4 Be6 22 Ne4 Rhd8 23 Red1 Bf5! 24 f3 Bxe4 25 Rxd8 Rxd8 26 Rxd8 Bxd8 27 fxe4 Kc6 28 Ba3 b5 29 axb5+ Kxb5 and Black won (Porges-Tarrasch, Dresden 1892);

2) 10 Rd1+ Ke8 11 h3 (11 b3 g5 or, according to Pillsbury, 11 ... Bb4 with the idea of 12 Bb2 Bxc3!?) 11 ... a5 12 Bf4 (12 b3 Bb4!, Fritz 5-

Anand, Frankfurt rapidplay 1998) 12 ... Be6 13 g4 Ne7 14 Nd4 Nd5 15 Nce2 Bc5 16 Nxe6 fxe6 17 c4 Nb6 18 b3 with a small plus (Kasparov-Kramnik, London 9th matchgame 2000);

3) 10 h3 Bd7!? 11 b3 Ke8 (or 11 ... Kc8 12 Bb2 b6 13 Rad1, Kasparov-Kramnik, London 3rd matchgame 2000; Shirov-Kramnik, Astana 2001) 12 Bb2 Rd8 13 Rad1 Ne7 14 Rfe1 Ng6 15 Ne4, and the careless 15 ... Nf4? gave White a very strong attack after 16 e6! (Kasparov-Kramnik, Astana 2001).

9 ... Ke8! (but not 9 ... Be7?! 10 g4! Nh6 11 h3) **10 Nc3 h6 11 Bf4 Be6**



‘White’s pawn majority has but slight mobility.’ (Nimzowitsch)

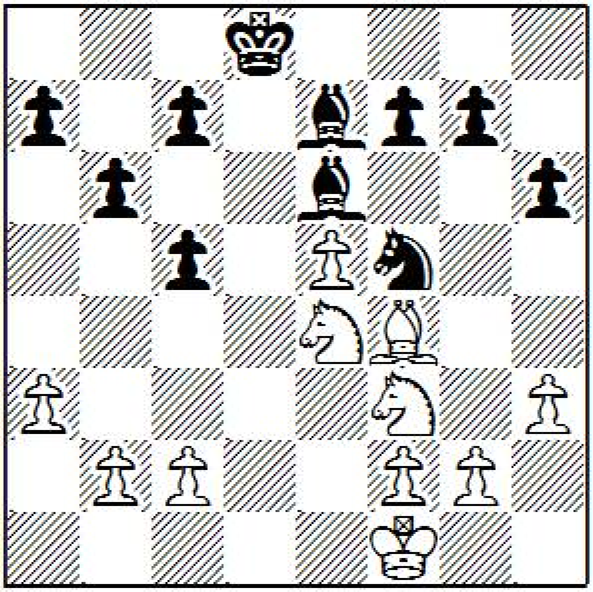
12 Rad1 Rd8 13 Ne4 c5

‘By threatening 14 ... Nd4, Black provokes an exchange of rooks, giving him the opportunity to bring his king’s rook into play.’ (Tarrasch)

14 Rxd8+ Kxd8 15 Rd1+ Kc8 16 h3 (with the threat of 17 g4 Ne7 18 Nxc5) **16 ... b6 17 Kf1 Be7 18 a3**

‘White is clearly having difficulty finding a good plan. After 18 Ke1? Bxa2 shutting in the bishop by 19 b3 does not work in view of 19 ... c4, for example: 20 Ned2 (if 20 Nfd2, then 20 ... cxb3 and 21 ... Nd4) 20 ... cxb3 21 cxb3 Bb4 22 Kf1 Bxd2 23 Nxd2 Nd4.’ (Tarrasch)

18 ... Rd8 19 Rxd8+ Kxd8



‘The exchange of rooks has sensibly increased the radius of action of Black’s king.’ (Nimzowitsch)

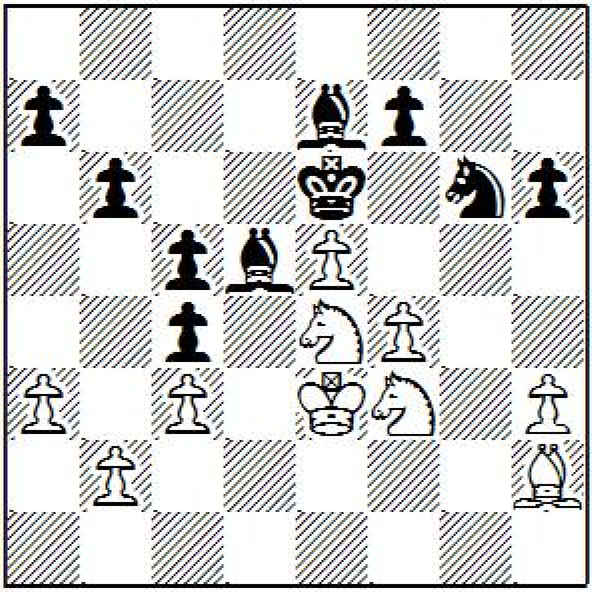
20 c3

‘This move, weakening the queenside still further, is necessary due to the threat of 20 ... Nd4. Now Black gains more and more space.’ (Tarrasch)

20 ... Bd5 21 Nfd2 Kd7 22 Ke2 g5

22 ... Nh4 23 g3 Ng6 24 Ke3 Ke6 25 Nf3 is unclear.

23 Bh2 Nh4 24 g3 Ng6 25 f4 Ke6 26 Ke3 c4 27 Nf3 gxf4+ 28 gxf4 (threatening both 28 Nd4+ and the unexpected 28 f5+ Kxf5 29 Nd4 mate!) **28 ... c5!**



Nimzowitsch gives this game as an illustration of the power of two bishops in the fight against a pawn majority, and this position as an example of the miraculous action of the blockade: ‘In the position now reached White’s pieces are fairly well shut in. This gratifying state of affairs has followed almost automatically from Black’s successfully executed blockade of White’s e5-pawn and in particular his f4-pawn.’

29 Ng3 Nh4 (preventing f4-f5) **30 Nxh4 Bxh4 31 Ne4 Be7** (otherwise 32 Nd6) **32 Bg1 Bc6**

‘The intention is ... Kd5 followed by ... Bd7-f5, driving the knight yet further back.’ (Nimzowitsch)

33 Bf2 Bd7 34 Bg3?!

‘As was correctly pointed out by Metger, with 34 Nd6! White would have retained chances of a draw; after 34 ... Bxd6 35 exd6 there are opposite-colour bishops left on the board.’ (Tarrasch) This was also pointed out by Nimzowitsch. I should only like to add 34 ... b5 35 Bg3 f5 36 Bf2 with equality.

34 ... Kd5 35 Nf2?

A fatal retreat. 35 Nd6!? Bxd6 36 exd6 Bxh3 37 f5 Bxf5 38 Bh2 was essential, although it would not yet have guaranteed a draw: 38 ... Bd7 must be considered followed by the unhurried transference of the king and the advance of the b-pawn.

35 ... h5 36 Kf3

Or 36 h4 Bf5 and the knight cannot come into play.

36 ... Bf5

‘Blockade!’ Nimzowitsch exclaims joyfully, and he sums up: ‘We can say with some justice that the restraint of the pawn majority once in operation carries with it automatically the hemming in of the knights; that is to say the blockading pawns may easily develop into obstructions to their own knights.’

37 Ke3 b5! 38 Kf3 a5 39 Ke3 (White is in a kind of stalemate) **39 ... b4 40 Kf3 Kc6 41 axb4**

If 41 h4, then the reply 41 ... Kb5 42 Ne4 Ka4 wins.

41 ... cxb4 42 cxb4 axb4 43 Ne4 Kd5 44 Nd6 Bxd6 45 exd6 c3 46 bxc3 b3 0-1

It is obvious that this type of win ultimately gave birth to one of the famous Tarrasch aphorisms: ‘The future belongs to he who has the bishops.’ One also recalls the classic ending of the game Tarrasch-Rubinstein (San Sebastian 1912), where, it is true, the Doctor was the victim ...

Both in his play, and in his commentaries, Tarrasch aimed to follow general rules, and he methodically formulated them, completing Steinitz’s work. Honour and praise to him for the fact that nowadays these rules are known by any graded player! Of course, certain of his aphorisms sometimes provoke a smile – for example, ‘if one piece stands badly – the whole game stands badly’, or ‘a knight on the edge of the board always stands badly’. In a number of cases it is possible to gain an advantage even with a ‘bad’ knight: we can recall, among others, the games Lasker-Schlechter (Vienna/Berlin 10th matchgame 1910 – *Game No.58*) and Kasparov-Karpov (London/Leningrad 16th matchgame 1986). However, Tarrasch’s ‘dogmas’ are not eternal truisms, but merely instructional material presented in an accessible and witty form, those necessary rudiments from which one can begin to grasp the secrets of chess ...

The following game, played after a tournament race lasting 36 days and an exchange of blows in the play-off match, decided the fate of first prize at Vienna 1898.

Game 48

S.Tarrasch-H.Pillsbury

Play-off match for first prize, Vienna 1898, 3rd game

Four Knights Game C49

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 Nc3 (avoiding the Berlin Defence!) **4 ... Bb4 5 0-0 0-0 6 d3 d6 7 Bg5 Bxc3 8 bxc3 Ne7**

Pillsbury's favourite manoeuvre. Later they began to give preference to Metger's move 8 ... Qe7 (Kiel 1893) with the idea of 9 Re1 Nd8 10 d4 Ne6 or 10 ... Bg4.

9 Bc4

'Objectively stronger is 9 Nh4!' (Tarrasch) For example: 9 ... Ng6 10 Nxg6 fxg6 11 Bc4+ Kh8 12 f4! h6 13 fxe5 dxe5 14 Bh4 g5 15 Bg3 Qe7 16 d4 with advantage (Janowski-Spielmann, Nuremberg 1906) or 9 ... c6 10 Bc4 Be6? (10 ... d5 11 Bb3 Qd6 is correct) 11 Bxf6 gxf6 12 Bxe6 fxe6 13 Qg4+ Kf7 14 f4! with a typical attack (Capablanca-Steiner, Los Angeles 1933).

9 ... Be6

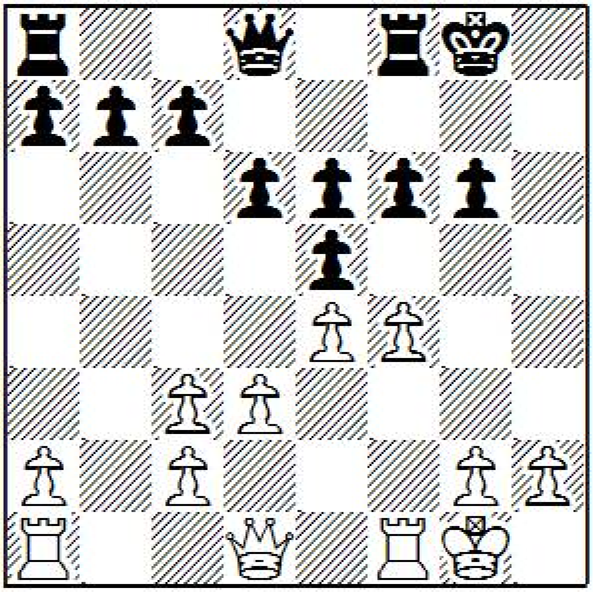
Eleven years later in his match with Janowski (Paris 1909) Lasker improved Black's play with 9 ... Ng6! 10 Nh4 Nf4! 11 Bxf4 exf4 12 Nf3 Bg4 (12 ... Be6!?) and gained excellent prospects after both 13 h3 Bh5 14 Rb1 b6 15 Qd2 Bxf3 16 gxf3 Nh5 17 Kh2 Qf6 (second game), and 13 Qd2 Bxf3 14 gxf3 Nh5! (fourth game).

10 Bxf6

Janowski also tried 10 Bb3!? Bxb3 11 axb3 Nd7 12 d4 f6 13 Be3 Ng6 14 Qd3 Kh8 15 Nd2 a6 16 f4.

10 ... gxf6 11 Bxe6 fxe6 12 Nh4 Ng6 13 Nxg6 hxg6 14 f4!

It is amusing that, several years later, in another triumphant tournament for him (Ostend 1907), Tarrasch crushed in similar fashion ... the obstinate Janowski, the third prize-winner at Vienna 1898.



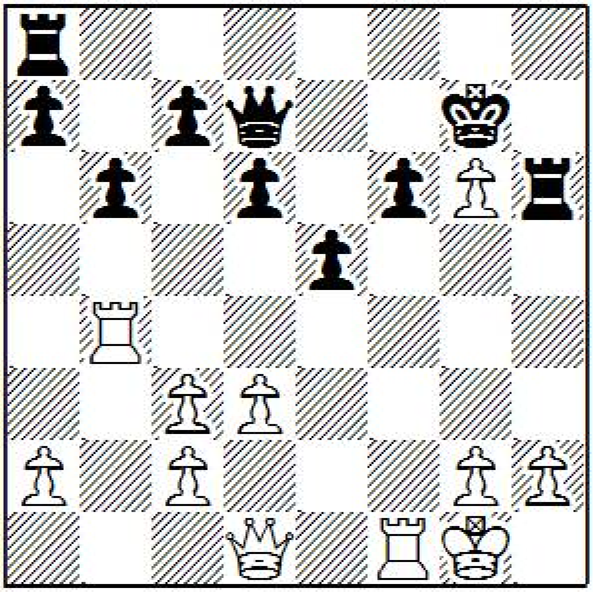
14 ... Kg7?!

Trying to repair ‘the hideous position of the kingside pawns’, Tarrasch suggested 14 ... f5, after which the commentators recommended 15 fxe5 dxe5 16 Qb1!? b6 17 Qb3 Qd6 18 exf5 gxf5 19 Rae1 with an edge for White.

15 f5 exf5 16 exf5 Rh8 17 fxg6 Rh6

Very dangerous for Black is 17 ... Kxg6 18 Qg4+ Kf7 19 Rf3 Qe7 20 Raf1 Rh6 21 Rg3 Rah8 22 Rxf6+! Qxf6 (22 ... Kxf6? 23 Rf3 mate; 22 ... Rxf6 23 Qg7+ Ke6 24 Qxh8 wins) 23 Rf3 with the threat of Qd7+.

18 Rb1! (in order to switch the rook to the kingside with gain of tempo) **18 ... b6 19 Rb4 Qd7**



20 Rxf6!

A spectacular blow, which was not foreseen by any of the masters studying the position in a neighbouring room. They expected the not altogether clear 20 Qf3 Rf8.

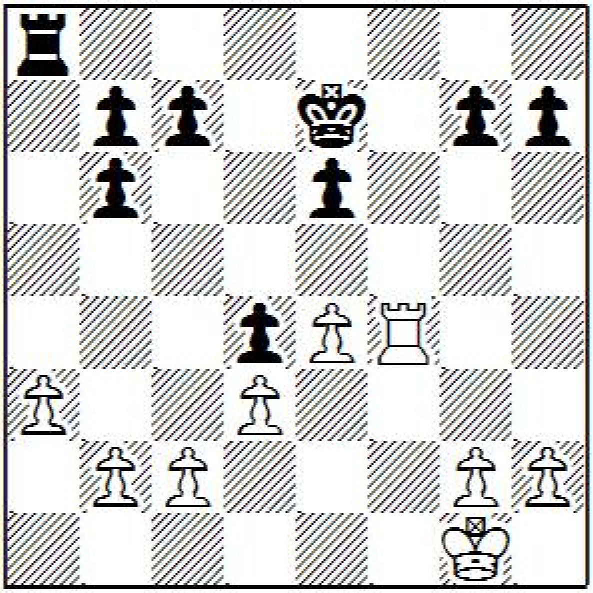
20 ... Kxf6 21 Qf3+ Kg7 (if 21 ... Kxg6, then 22 Rg4+ Kh7 23 Qe4+ Kh8 24 Qxa8+) **22 Qxa8 c5 23 Rb1 Rxg6 24 Rf1 Qe7 25 c4,** and White converted his advantage: **25 ... e4 26 Qxe4 Qxe4 27 dxe4 Rg4 28 Re1 Kf6 29 g3 Ke5 30 c3 Rg7 31 Kg2 Rb7 32 a4 a6 33 h4 b5 34 axb5 axb5 35 cxb5 Rxb5 36 Kh3 c4 37 Kg4 Rb2 38 h5 Rc2 39 Rh1 Ra2 40 h6 Ra8 41 h7 Rh8 42 Kg5 Kxe4 43 Kg6 Kd3 44 Kg7 Rxh7+ 45 Kxh7 Kxc3 46 Rd1 1-0**

Earlier we saw how casually Lasker overcame in the endgame the victor at Cambridge Springs, Marshall (*Game No.45*). Something similar was achieved a couple of years before that by Tarrasch.

Game 49

F.Marshall-S.Tarrasch

Candidates match, Nuremberg 1905, 7th game



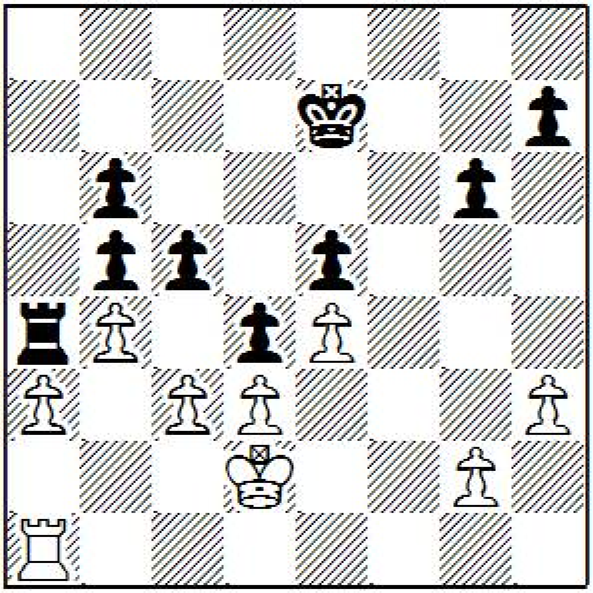
20 ... Ra5!? (far more lively than 20 ... e5 21 Rf5 Ke6 with a level game) **21 Kf1?! Rc5 22 Rf2 Rb5! 23 b3 Rh5!**

It has to be agreed that this rook is no less ‘rabid’ than Lasker’s ...

24 h3 b5! 25 b4 Rg5 26 Rf4 e5 27 Rf2 Rg6 28 Rf5 Re6 29 Ke2?

Marshall has no feeling for ‘simple’ positions. After 29 Rh5! White does not have even a hint of a problem: 29 ... Ra6 30 Rxh7 Kf6 31 Rh8 Rxa3 32 Ke2 or 29 ... h6 30 Ke2 g5 31 h4.

29 ... g6 30 Rf1 Ra6 31 Ra1 b6 32 Kd2 Ra4 33 c3 c5



34 cxd4!

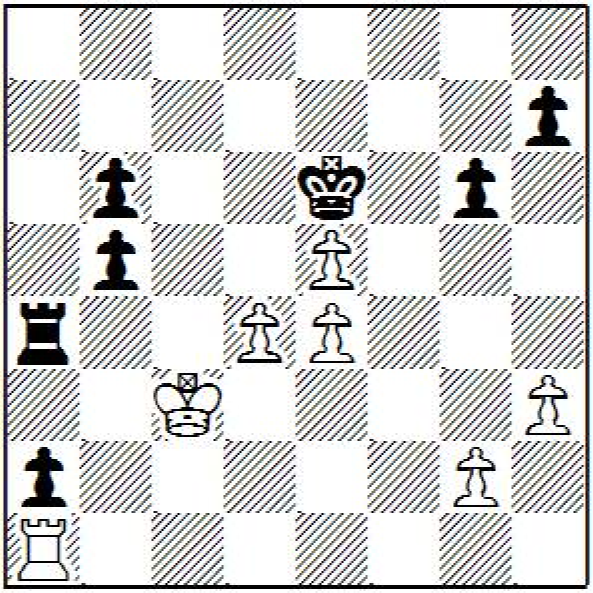
When the time came to calculate, the USA champion rejected 34 Kc2 dxc3 35 Rb1?! Kd6 36 Rb3 cxb4 37 Rxb4 Kc5!, and the computer suggests that he was right: 38 Rxa4 bxa4 39 Kxc3 b5 40 h4 h5 41 g3 b4+! 42 axb4+ Kb5, or 38 Rb3 b4 39 axb4+ Kd4 40 Rxc3 Ra2+ 41 Kb3 Ra3+ 42 Kxa3 Kxc3 43 Ka4 Kxd3 44 Kb5 Kxe4 45 Kxb6 Kd5 46 b5 e4 47 Kc7 e3 48 b6 e2 49 b7 e1Q 50 b8Q Qe5+ 51 Kc8 Qxb8+ 52 Kxb8 Ke5 and Black wins in both cases.

34 ... cxb4

Nothing was achieved by 34 ... exd4 35 bxc5 bxc5 36 Rb1 Ra5 37 Kc2, for example: 37 ... Kd6 38 Kb3 Ke5 39 Rc1 c4+ 40 dxc4 bxc4+ 41 Rxc4 Kxe4 42 Rc7 d3 43 Re7+ Kd4 44 Rd7+ Ke3 45 Re7+ Kf2 46 Rd7, or 37 ... c4 38 dxc4 bxc4 39 Rd1 d3+ 40 Kc3 Ra4 41 Rd2 Ke6 42 Kd4 with a level game.

35 dxe5 Ke6 36 d4 bxa3 37 Kc3 a2

Black has set his opponent many problems, and Marshall is unable to hold out ...



38 g4?

Strangely enough, 38 h4! h5 39 g3 would still have given a draw: 39 ... Ke7 40 Kd3 Ra3+ 41 Kc2 Rxg3 42 Rxa2 Rg2+ 43 Kb3 Rxa2 44 Kxa2 g5 45 hxg5 h4 46 d5 h3 47 d6+, or 39 ... Kd7 40 Kd3 Ra3+ 41 Kc2.

38 ... g5 (now White is in zugzwang) **39 Kd3 b4 40 Kc4 b3+ 41 Kxb3 Rxd4 42 Rxa2 Rxe4 43 Ra6 Re3+ 44 Kc2 Rxh3 45 Rxb6+ Kxe5 46 Rb4 Re3 47 Kd2 Re4 0-1**

And now a well-known and instructive game by the follower of the first world champion, following in the footsteps of the classic game Steinitz-Sellmann (*Game No.16*), where the outcome was also decided by White’s occupation of the d4-square.

Game 50

S.Tarrasch-R.Teichmann

San Sebastian 1912

French Defence C14

1 e4 e6

It should be remembered that the Doctor also played this opening masterfully with Black, even when Chigorin chose the rare plan with 2 Qe2 (*Game Nos.27, 30*).

2 d4 d5 3 Nc3

Back in 1890 Tarrasch introduced the ‘very good continuation of the attack’ 3 Nd2. By contrast, he had attached a question mark to 3 e5 since the time of his win over Louis Paulsen (Nuremberg 1888), and in San Sebastian 1912 he had a critical encounter on this theme with Nimzowitsch (*Game No.92*).

3 ... Nf6

Incidentally, the variation with 3 ... Bb4, which (in some countries) bears the name of its developer Nimzowitsch, was tried by Tarrasch back in a game with Gottschall (Nuremberg 1888), and after 4 e5 Ne7 5 f4?! c5 6 a3 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 c4 8 Nf3 Qa5 9 Qd2 Nbd7!? 10 Nh4 Nb6 he carried out the blockading plan with the manoeuvre of a minor piece to a4, which half a century later was to be successfully employed by Botvinnik – for example, against Tolush (14th USSR Championship, Moscow 1945).

4 Bg5

Also good is the ‘pure’ Steinitz variation 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4, as in the aforementioned game with Sellman.

4 ... Be7

Nowadays it is fashionable to fight for equality with Rubinstein’s simplifying 4 ... dxe4. Tarrasch considered this, like 3 ... dxe4, to be unacceptable (the centre is conceded!), but experience has confirmed that Rubinstein was right. Generally speaking, Tarrasch often carried over his popular ideas of chess philosophy, which were suitable for beginners, to crucial disputes with the world’s leading players – and sometimes he was proved wrong ...

5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 (6 h4 – *Game No.112*) **6 ... Qxe7 7 Qd2**

Englisch’s move (Paris 1878). Steinitz used to play 7 f4, while earlier Tarrasch himself preferred 7 Bd3, with which he beat Barthmann (Nuremberg 1883). He regarded this win, along with his game against Noa (Hamburg 1885), as the ‘prototype’ of the present encounter.

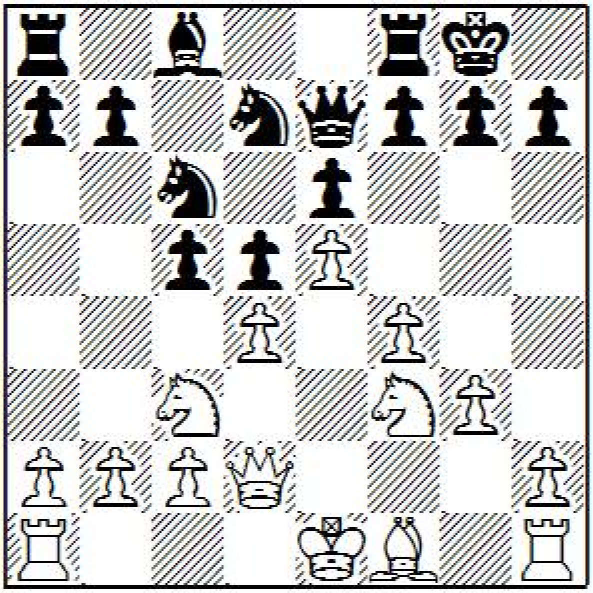
7 ... 0-0

Bad is 7 ... c5?! 8 Nb5 0-0?! 9 Nc7 cxd4 10 Nxa8 etc.

8 f4 c5

There is no point in losing time on 8 ... a6 (since here Nb5 is not a threat): after 9 Nf3 c5 Steinitz's plan with 10 dxc5 gains in strength.

9 Nf3 (if 9 Nb5?!, then 9 ... a6 10 Nd6 cxd4 11 Nf3 f6! is good) **9 ... Nc6 10 g3**



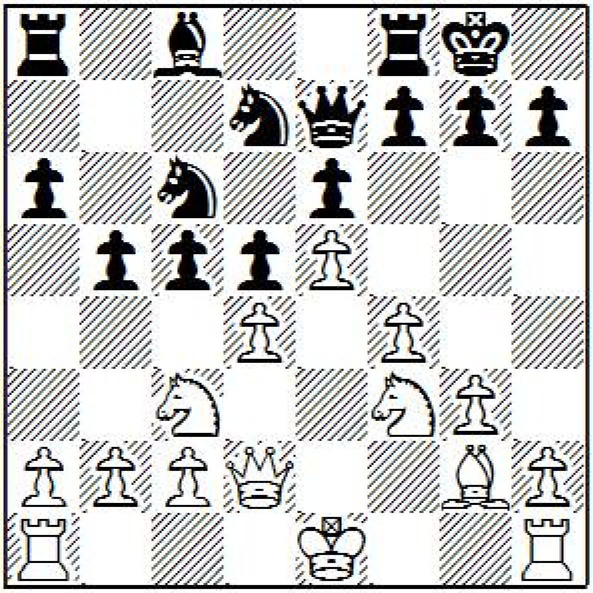
'This move, suggested by Rubinstein, is fully consistent with the entire variation, devised not for an attack on the b1-h7 diagonal, but for weakening Black's centre.' (Tarrasch) 10 0-0-0 Nb6 11 h4 Bd7 with equal chances has also been played, but to this day Steinitz's 10 dxc5! remains the main plan.

10 ... a6

'Black avoids 10 ... f6, to avoid falling in with his opponent's intentions,' writes Tarrasch, having in mind 11 exf6 Qxf6 12 0-0-0 a6 13 Bg2 Nb6 14 Rhe1 Nc4 15 Qf2 b5 16 dxc5!? Nxb2? 17 Kxb2 b4 18 Nd4! bxc3+ 19 Ka1! with a won game (Rubinstein-Levenfish, Carlsbad 1911). Even so, undermining the centre is in fact the way to call into question White's slow strategy. Firstly, strong is 16 ... b4 17 Na4 Bd7! (Levenfish), and secondly – 11 ... Nxf6 12 0-0-0 (12 dxc5 e5!; 12 Bg2 cxd4 13 Nxd4 e5!) 12 ... cxd4 13 Nxd4 e5! 14 fxe5 Qxe5 with an excellent game.

11 Bg2 b5?!

Definitely more appropriate is 11 ... Nb6! 12 b3 Bd7 13 Ne2 cxd4 with equality (Kostic-Maróczy, Bled 1931).



12 0-0!

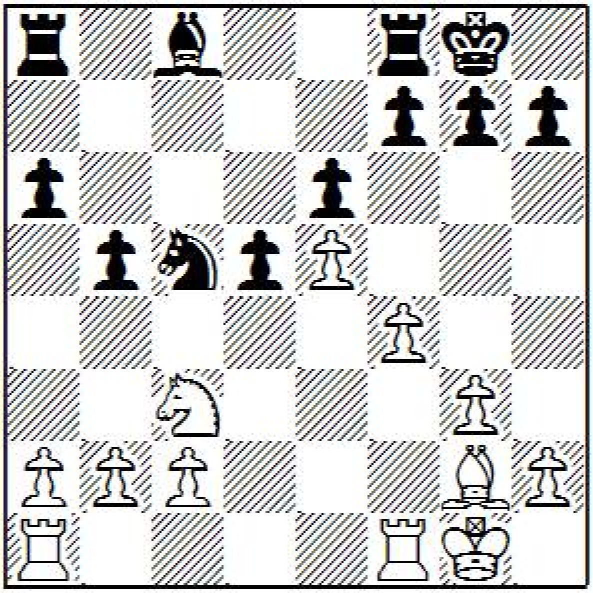
12 0-0-0?! is dangerous in view of 12 ... c4, then ... Nb6 and ... b5-b4 with an attack.

12 ... cxd4 13 Nxd4

A little later Tarrasch tried 13 Ne2!? against Lowtzky (Breslau 1912) – and correctly: why exchange queens? The game continued 13 ... Nb6?! (here the knight is cut off; better is 13 ... Nc5 14 Nexd4 Nxd4 15 Nxd4 Bb7, aiming for e4 with the knight in the hope of counterplay) 14 b3 Bd7 15 Nexd4 Qc5 16 Rf2! (after retaining control of d4, the Doctor firmly carries out his classic plan) 16 ... Rac8 17 Nxc6 Rxc6 18 Qd4 Rfc8 19 Bf1 Na8?! 20 a4! bxa4 21 Rxa4 a5 22 Qa1! Qb6 (22 ... Qe3 23 Bd3! Rxc2? 24 Bxc2 Rxc2 25 Qd4 Qxf2+ 26 Qxf2 Rxf2 27 Rxa5! wins) 23 Nd4 Rxc2 (23 ... Rc5 24 b4!) 24 Nxc2 Rxc2 25 Rd4! and White won. An effective supplement to the duel with Teichmann!

13 ... Nxd4 14 Qxd4 Qc5 15 Qxc5 Nxc5

In this position Teichmann offered a draw, but he received a courteous refusal.



16 Ne2!

‘White has more space; Black is cramped not only by the e5-pawn, but also by his own e6-pawn. The white knight will occupy a dominating position at d4, from which it cannot be driven away; for the black knight this is something that cannot be achieved.’ (Tarrasch)

16 ... Bd7 17 Nd4 Rac8 18 Kf2!

‘Although Black controls the only almost open file, as a counter to this White has a significant advantage: he can post in the centre the most important endgame piece – the king, which is something that again Black cannot do.’ (Tarrasch)

18 ... Rc7 19 Ke3 Re8?!

Planless play (apparently Black was afraid of f4-f5). Nowadays in such a position Black would nevertheless gain a draw – by, say, 19 ... Rfc8 or 19 ... a5!? (with the idea of ... Rb8 and ... b5-b4) 20 f5 exf5 21 Bxd5 Re8 etc.

20 Rf2! Nb7 21 Bf1

‘White must, at last, advantageously deploy his bishop, since at g2 it was dragging out a rather miserable existence.’ (Tarrasch)

21 ... Na5 22 b3 h6?!

‘When there is a lack of good moves, bad ones are made – this is an old truth. Nothing spoils a position so strongly and irreparably as pawn moves.’ (Tarrasch) How very true! Of course, Black should have played 22 ... Nc6 – why give himself an additional weakness?

23 Bd3

‘Now this piece too stands better than its black opposite number. In general, the trio of pieces in the centre is operating splendidly.’ (Tarrasch) Complete domination in the centre has been achieved, and from now on White’s plan is a breakthrough on the kingside. Up to a certain point he plays very accurately.

23 ... Nc6 24 Nxc6! Bxc6 25 Kd4

‘To the end of the game the king will all the time be ready to invade at c5 and attack the enemy pawns, and so the black rook must constantly guard the c-file.’ (Tarrasch)

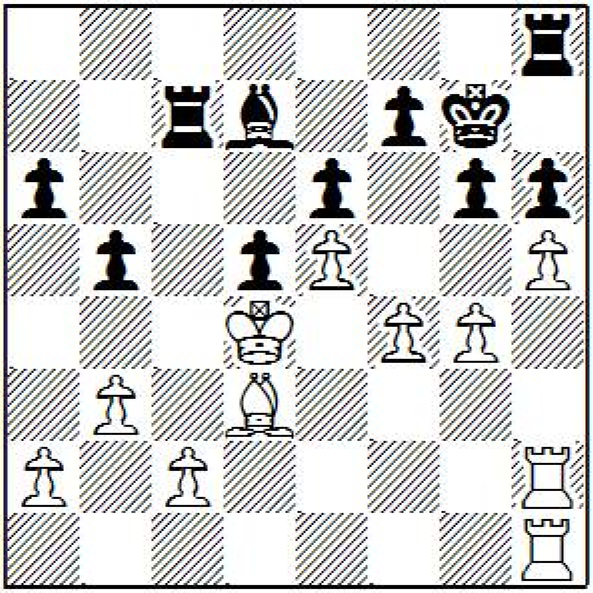
25 ... Bd7 26 g4!

Disclosing the defectiveness of 22 ... h6: now White has something to latch on to.

26 ... Bc8 27 h4 (with the threat of 28 g5 h5 29 g6!) **27 ... g6 28 Rh1**

Of course, not 28 g5?! h5!, and Black blocks the kingside.

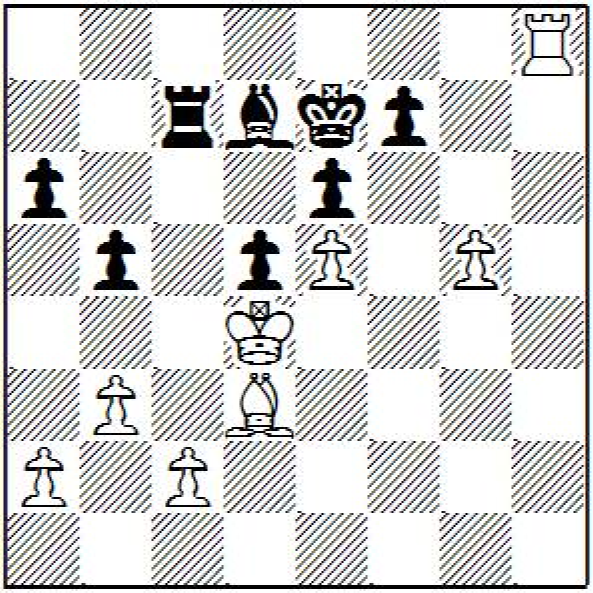
28 ... Kg7 29 h5 Rh8 30 Rfh2 Bd7



31 g5!

This leads to the inevitable opening of one of the files and the invasion of the rook.

31 ... hxg5 32 fxg5 Rxh5 (even worse was 32 ... Be8? 33 hxg6 Rxh2 34 gxf7! and wins) **33 Rxh5 gxh5 34 Rxh5 Kf8 35 Rh8+ Ke7**



36 g6?

Unexpectedly White makes a serious mistake. Euwe's move 36 Ra8?! is also dubious in view of 36 ... Bc8 37 a4 bxa4 38 bxa4 Bb7 39 Ra7 Kd7 40 c4 (or 40 c3 Kc8 41 Bxa6 Bxa6 42 Rxa6 Rc4+) 40 ... Kc8 41 cxd5 Kb8 42 d6 Rc8 with a probable draw.

'The immediate 36 Rh7! was better,' writes Tarrasch. 'If 36 ... Ke8, then 37 c3 and Be2-h5 with a double attack on the f-pawn. And after 36 ... Kf8 there would have followed 37 g6 fxg6 38 Bxg6 Kg8 39 Rf7 Kh8 40 Bh7! when Black is stalemated. But the immediate g5-g6 also leads to a win.'

Whether or not this is so, we will see shortly, but for the moment let us check Brinkmann's recommendation 39 ... b4! (instead of 39 ... Kh8?): 40 Bh5! a5 (or 40 ... Kh8 41 Bg4! Kg8 42 Rxd7! Rxd7 43 Bxe6+ Rf7 44 Kxd5 and wins) 41 Bg6 a4 42 Bh5 a3 (inadequate is 42 ... Rxc2 43 Rxd7 a3 44 Bf7+ Kf8 45 Bxe6 Rxa2 46 Bxd5 Ra1 47 e6 Rd1+ 48 Kc5 a2 49 Rf7+ Kg8 50 Ra7 a1Q 51 Rxa1 Rxa1 52 e7+) 43 Bg6 Kh8 44 Bh7. Here Neishtadt places the evaluation 'winning advantage', but in my opinion one more move should be made – 44 ... Rc3! (if 44 ... Rc6 the computer suggests 45 Bd3! Bc8 46 Ra7 Kg8 47 Ra4 winning) and the win is not so obvious:

1) 45 Rxd7? Rc7 46 Rd6 Kxh7 47 Rxe6 Rxc2 48 Kxd5 Rxa2 49 Kc5 Rc2+ 50 Kxb4 a2 51 Ra6 Kg7 52 Ra7+ (52 Kb5 Kf7 53 b4 Ke7) 52 ... Kg6 53 e6 (whether or not there is a 'winning advantage' here is unclear) 53 ... Kf6 54 e7 Kf7 55 Kb5 Ke8 56 b4 Kf7 57 Kb6 Ke8 with a draw – a pretty trick;

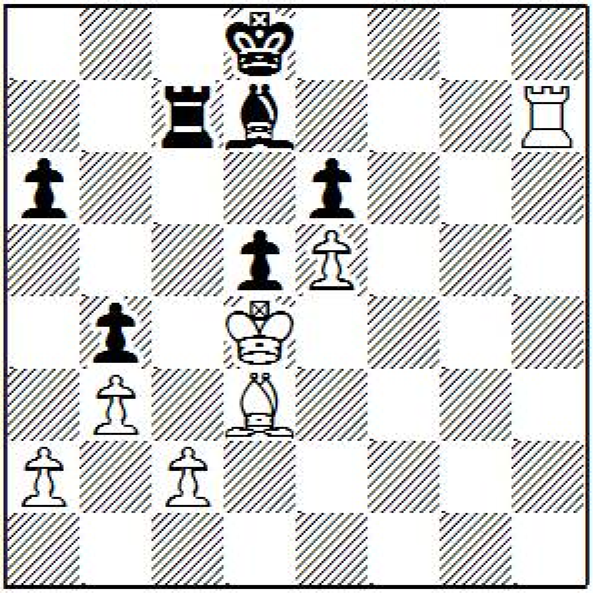
2) 45 Bd3! (this wins, fortunately) 45 ... Rc7 46 Bb5 Kg8 47 Rxd7 Rxc2 48 Ra7 Rxa2 49 Bd7 Ra1 50 Bxe6+ Kf8 51 Bxd5 a2 52 e6 Rd1+ 53 Kc5 a1Q 54 e7+ Ke8 55 Bc6+, and it is all over.

36 ... fxg6 37 Bxg6 b4!

Of course, not 37 ... Bc8? 38 Rh7+ Kd8 39 Rxc7 Kxc7 40 Kc5 (at last!) 40 ... Bd7 41 Bf7 Bc8 42 Be8 Bb7 43 b4 Bc8 (or 43 ... Ba8 44 Bf7 Kd7 45 Kb6 and wins) 44 Bc6 Bd7 (44 ... Bb7 45 Bxb7 Kxb7 46 Kd6 is also hopeless) 45 Bxd7 Kxd7 46 Kb6 and wins.

38 Rh7+ Kd8 39 Bd3

This is now the last critical point in the game.



39 ... Rc3?

A blunder. Tarrasch states laconically: '39 ... Rc6 was better.' But after this I have been unable to find a win: 40 Rh1 Kc7 41 a3 bxa3 42 Ra1 Kb6 43 Rxa3 a5, say, is simply a dead draw, a fortress! Which means that, as often happens, at the very last moment Teichmann missed an unexpected saving chance ...

40 a3! a5 41 Rh8+ Ke7 1-0 (or 41 ... Kc7 42 Ra8 Kb6 43 Ra6+)

Here, without waiting for 42 Ra8, Black resigned.

In the fifth round of the preliminary part of the super-tournament in St Petersburg (1914), Tarrasch, in the words of one historian, ‘played a game, the finish of which is known by any player who has the slightest experience: the innovator Nimzowitsch suffered badly at the hands of the classic.’ Moreover, in a Tarrasch Defence!

Game 51

A.Nimzowitsch-S.Tarrasch

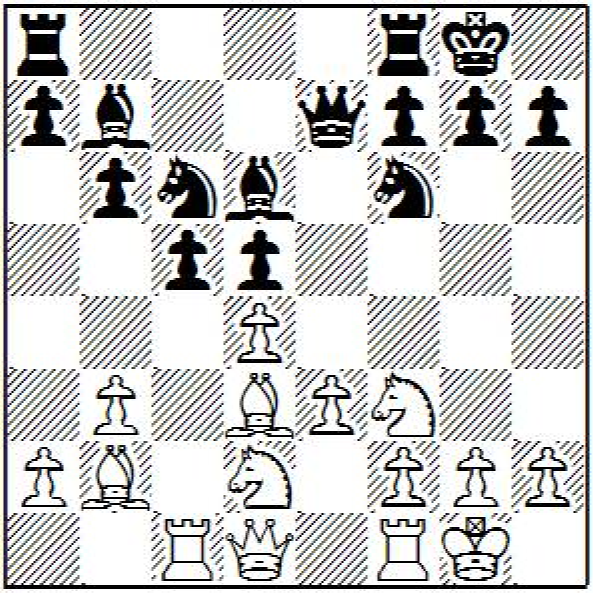
St Petersburg 1914, preliminary tournament

Queen’s Gambit D30

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 c5 3 c4 e6 4 e3 (4 cxd5 exd5 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 g3 is stronger – *Game No.64*) **4 ... Nf6 5 Bd3 Nc6 6 0-0 Bd6**

Also good, in the spirit of the Queen’s Gambit Accepted, was 6 ... dxc4 7 Bxc4 a6 (Janowski-Lasker, Berlin 4th matchgame 1910), but Tarrasch was happier playing these positions as White.

7 b3 0-0 8 Bb2 b6 9 Nbd2 Bb7 10 Rc1 (10 Ne5!?) **10 ... Qe7 11 cxd5 exd5**

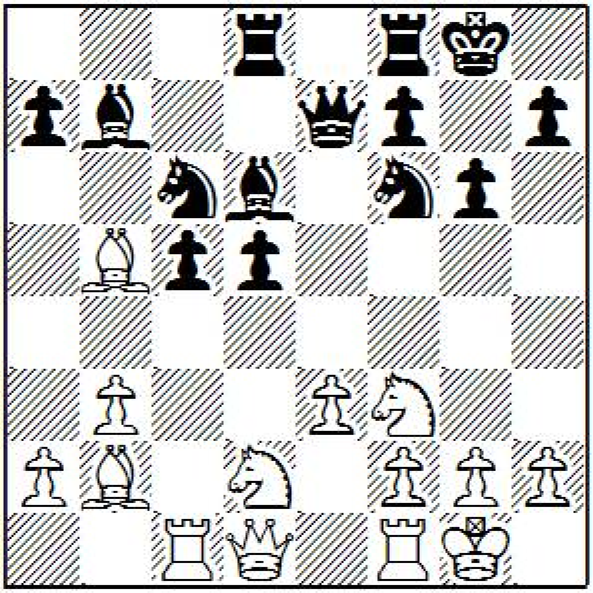


12 Nh4 g6 13 Nhf3 Rad8

The typical 13 ... Ne4?! is premature in view of 14 dxc5! bxc5? 15 Bxe4 dxe4 16 Nxe4 Qxe4 17 Qxd6 and wins.

14 dxc5?! bxc5 15 Bb5?!

Nimzowitsch handles this classical variation passively and unsuccessfully, feeling much less confident in it that in ‘his’ modernistic variations. There was nowhere for him to employ his imagination, and it was possibly games such as this one that made him think that in chess one should play differently ...



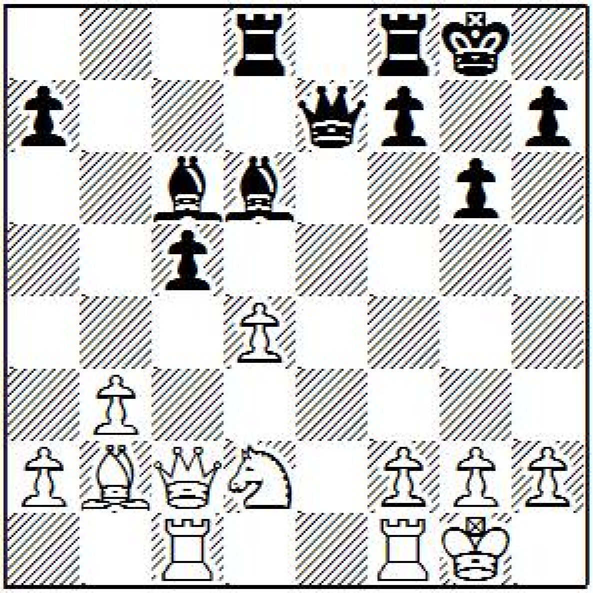
15 ... Ne4 16 Bxc6 Bxc6 17 Qc2 (if 17 b4 there is 17 ... Bb5!) **17 ... Nxd2!** (to divert the knight from f3) **18 Nxd2**

‘Also after the better 18 Qxd2 Black has fine attacking chances.’ (Euwe)

18 ... d4!

A classic breakthrough. Of numerous similar instances, the first that come to mind are the games Spassky-Tal (Montreal 1979), Korchnoi-Karpov (Merano 1st matchgame 1981) and, with reversed colours, Kasparov-Portisch (Niksic 1983).

19 exd4?



The decisive mistake. White should have reconciled himself to an inferior game after 19 e4 Rfe8 or 19 Rfe1 Rfe8 20 Nc4 Bc7.

19 ... Bxh2+!?

Tarrasch is captivated by the famous game Lasker-Bauer (*Game No.36*): of course, he could not resist the temptation to win in classical fashion, with the sacrifice of both bishops! Although he could have achieved his goal more quickly with 19 ... Bxg2! 20 Kxg2 (20 dxc5 Qg5!) 20 ... Qg5+, when the white army is unable to come to the aid of its king: 21 Kh1 (21 Kh3 Qh5+) 21 ... Qf4 22 Kg2 Qxh2+ 23 Kf3 Rfe8 24 Ne4 Qf4+ 25 Kg2 Rxe4, or 21 Kf3 Rfe8! (the strongest) 22 Rg1 Qf4+ 23 Kg2 Re2 and wins.

20 Kxh2 Qh4+ 21 Kg1 Bxg2! 22 f3!

White would have lost easily after 22 Kxg2? Qg4+ 23 Kh1 Rd5! 24 Qxc5 Rh5+ 25 Qxh5 Qxh5+ 26 Kg2 Qg5+ 27 Kh2 Qxd2.

22 ... Rfe8! (but not 22 ... Qg3? because of 23 Ne4) **23 Ne4**

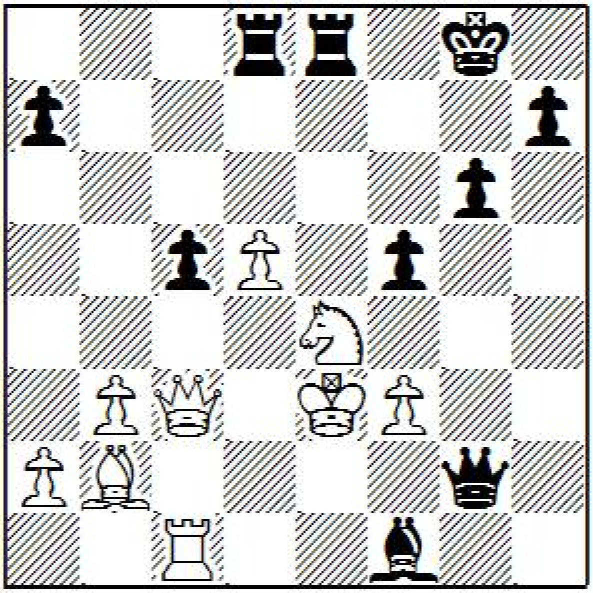
No better was 23 Rfe1 (23 Kxg2? Re2+) 23 ... Rxe1+ 24 Rxe1 Qxe1+ 25 Kxg2 Qe2+ 26 Kg3 in view of 26 ... Rd5! 27 f4 Rh5 and wins.

23 ... Qh1+ 24 Kf2 Bxf1 25 d5

A desperate attempt to create counter-threats along the a1-h8 diagonal. The bishop cannot be taken: 25 Rxf1? Qh2+ and 26 ... Qxc2.

25 ... f5! 26 Qc3 (or 26 Nf6+ Kf7 27 Nxe8 Rxe8 winning) **26 ... Qg2+ 27 Ke3**

But not 27 Ke1? Qe2 mate.



27 ... Rxe4+!

A spectacular concluding sacrifice. Here the Doctor no doubt remembered one of his immortal aphorisms: ‘Chess, like love and music, has the ability to make man happy.’

28 fxe4 f4+!?

Much more elegant than the ‘crude’ 28 ... Qg3+! 29 Kd2 Qf2+ 30 Kd1 Qe2 mate.

29 Kxf4 Rf8+ 30 Ke5 (30 Ke3 Rf3 mate) **30 ... Qh2+ 31 Ke6 Re8+ 32 Kd7** (32 Kf6 Qf4 mate) **32 ... Bb5 mate**

A splendid win, which conceded the special prize ‘for brilliancy’ to the game Capablanca-Bernstein (*Game No.83*) only because the combination that occurred here had a ‘predecessor’. But in my opinion, this game was better!

As we see, the ‘positional dogmatist’ Tarrasch did not shun combinations. Also after the war the old Doctor sometimes experimented, employing new, risky variations. Thus in Mährisch-Ostrau (1923) against Lasker he chose ... the Alekhine Defence! It was also there that the following highly instructive game was played.

Game 52

R.Spielmann-S.Tarrasch

Mährisch-Ostrau 1923

King’s Gambit C32

1 e4 e5 2 f4

It will be recalled that Spielmann was a fervent chess neo-romantic, a follower of Anderssen and Chigorin ‘the last knight of the King’s Gambit’. And to make a better appraisal of the critical nature of this encounter, take a look at what he wrote about his opponent:

‘Hardly had the direct attacking style given way to the positional, when Tarrasch appeared with his advocacy of the “new principles” of play. If these principles are followed in the games of Tarrasch himself, it becomes clear that in them there is no spirit of attack. Slowly, terribly slowly, almost stealthily, the chess forces move into play. Their motto is to avoid, as far as possible, an open battle and merely to besiege the opponent, blockade, and wait until his vital resources are exhausted, until his “air and water” run out, and then slowly crush him. For a long time this Tarrasch method has been extremely successful. His opponents either lost patience and bled to death in untimely sallies, or remained passive and were subjected to an absolute squeeze.’

2 ... d5 3 exd5 e4

Falkbeer’s classical counter-gambit – as played long before by Morphy!

4 d3

This would appear to be more promising than the alternative variation 4 Nc3 Nf6 5 d3 Bb4, as in the game Schulten-Morphy (*Game No.7*).

4 ... Nf6 (4 ... Qxd5 5 Qe2 etc.) **5 dxe4!?**

Berger’s plan, known from back in the late 1860s.

5 ... Nxe4 6 Nf3

Later, in 1941, Keres introduced 6 Be3!? For example: 6 ... Bd6 7 Nf3 0-0 (Bronstein-Unzicker, Moscow Olympiad 1956) 8 Bd3! Re8 9 0-0 Nf6 10 Ne5 Nbd7 11 Nc4 Nf8 12 Kh1! with the initiative (Muchnik), 6 ... Bc5 7 Bxc5 Nxc5 8 Qe2+ Qe7 9 Nc3 Bg4 10 Qxe7+ Kxe7 11 h3 Bf5 12 0-0-0 h5 13 Nf3 with a clear advantage for White (Spassky-Limbos, Varna Olympiad 1962), or 6 ... Qh4+ 7 g3 Nxg3 8 Nf3 (8 hxg3?! Qxh1 9 Qe2, as played by Keres and Tal, is more reckless) 8 ... Qe7 9 hxg3 Qxe3+ 10 Qe2 Qxe2+ 11

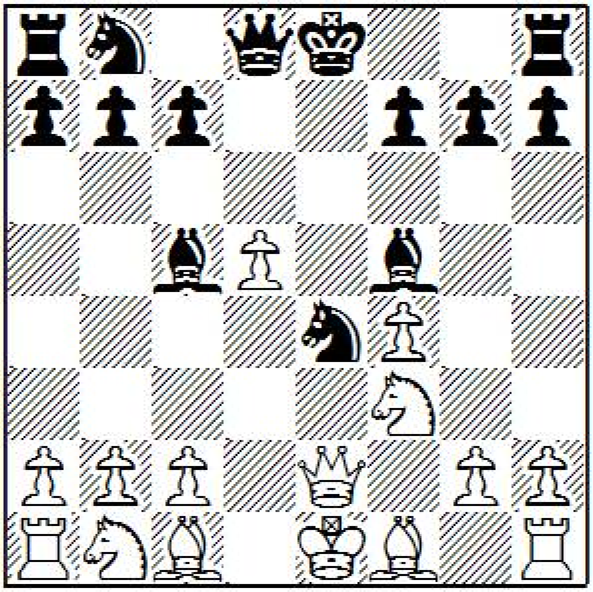
Bxe2 Bg4 12 Nc3 Bb4 13 Ng5 with slightly the better ending (Spassky-Matanovic, Belgrade 1964).

6 ... Bc5!

Of course, not 6 ... Bf5? 7 Be3! c6 8 Bc4 b5 9 Bb3 c5 10 d6! c4 11 Qd5 with an obvious advantage to White (Alekhine-Tarrasch, St Petersburg 1914). On this occasion the Doctor had prepared a surprise ...

7 Qe2 (7 Bd3!? is a suggestion of Tartakower) **7 ... Bf5!**

An important improvement in the main position of the variation! Earlier White had been successful after 7 ... f5 (7 ... Qxd5 8 Nfd2!; 7 ... Qe7 8 Be3!; 7 ... 0-0 8 Qxe4 Re8 9 Ne5 f6 10 Bb5! Krause) 8 Be3! Qxd5 9 Bxc5 Qxc5 10 Nc3 Qe7 11 Nd5 (Spielmann-Wolf, Düsseldorf 1908), or 7 ... Bf2+ 8 Kd1 Qxd5+ 9 Nfd2! f5 10 Nc3 Qd4 11 Ncxe4 fxe4 12 c3 (Réti-Breyer, Budapest 1917).



8 g4?

The intriguing point is that this thrust had been recommended by Spielmann in the latest edition of Bilguer’s *Handbuch* as the refutation of 7 ... Bf5. But here Tarrasch had devised something!

Of course, correct is 8 Nc3 Qe7 9 Be3!, as Tartakower soon announced in his famous theoretical work *Die hypermoderne Schachpartie* and his no less famous article *From the sickbed of the King’s Gambit*.

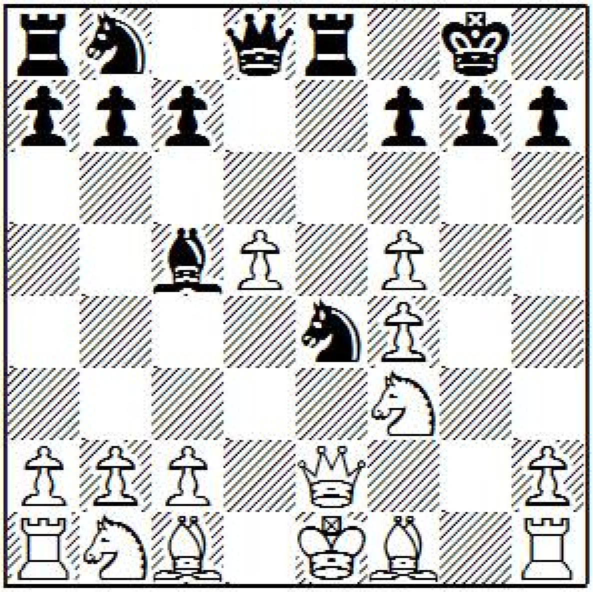
1) 9 ... Nxc3 10 Bxc5 Nxe2 11 Bxe7 Nxf4 12 Ba3!! with advantage to White, which was converted in the game Bronstein-Tal (Riga 1958) – cf. Bronstein’s remarkable book *200 Open Games*.

2) 9 ... Bxe3 10 Qxe3 Nxc3 11 Qxe7+ Kxe7 12 bxc3 Bxc2 13 Kd2 Bg6 14 Re1+ Kd6 15 Nd4! with the better endgame. Therefore Tartakower recommended the ‘equalising’ 12 ... Be4, and only nearly half a century later was it discovered that 13 Ng5! Bxd5 14 0-0-0 sets Black difficult problems.

8 ... 0-0!!

A brilliant bishop sacrifice, which must have stunned Spielmann.

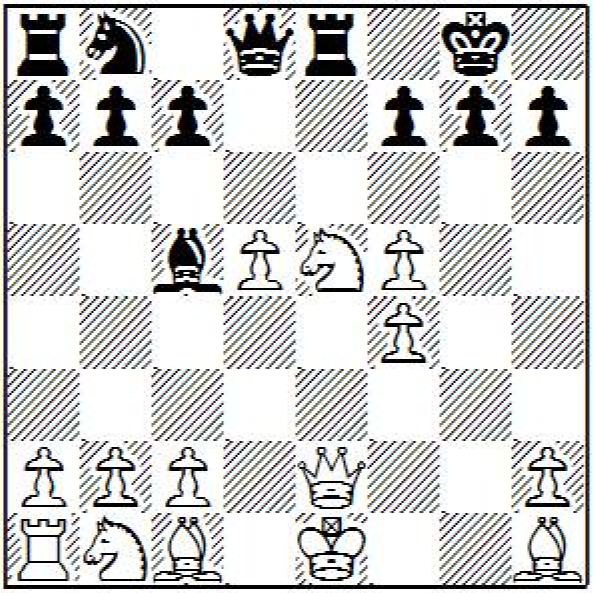
9 gxf5 Re8



10 Bg2

10 Qg2 comes into consideration (but not 10 Ne5? Qh4+). After this the loser and other commentators give the line 10 ... Qxd5 11 Be2 Nc6 12 Nc3 (*? – G. K.*) 12 ... Qxf5 with numerous threats. However, in my opinion it is stronger to interpose 12 f6! and only after 12 ... g6 or 12 ... Nxf6 to play 13 Nc3, when Black still has to demonstrate that his attack compensates for the piece deficit. Instead of 10 ... Qxd5 possibly better is 10 ... Ng3+ 11 Ne5 Nxh1 12 Qxh1 f6 13 d6 Bxd6 14 Bc4+ Kh8, nevertheless with advantage to Black.

10 ... Nf2 11 Ne5 Nxh1 12 Bxh1



12 ... Nd7!

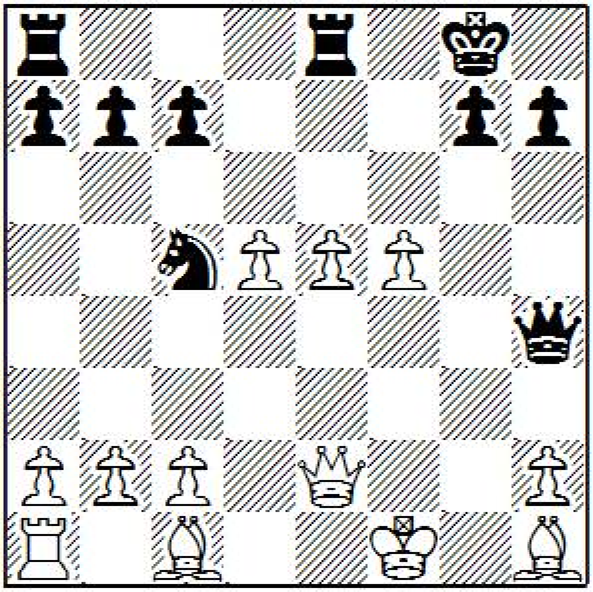
A brilliant move: things immediately become bad for White! 12 ... f6? was premature on account of 13 d6! fxe5 (13 ... cxd6? 14 Bd5+) 14 Qc4+ Kh8 15 Qxc5 Nc6 16 Qf2 Qxd6 17 Nc3, when Black stands badly.

13 Nc3 f6! 14 Ne4

It is hard to say whether it would have been more tenacious to play 14 Bd2 fxe5 15 0-0-0 exf4 16 Qc4 Bd6, when Black is the exchange up.

14 ... fxe5 15 Nxc5 Nxc5 16 fxe5 Qh4+ 17 Kf1

17 Kd1? Qd4+ was even worse, but now too the days of the white king are numbered.



17 ... Rf8! 18 Kg1?!

White would also have lost after 18 Qf3 Qxh2 19 Bf4 Qxc2 20 f6 Nd3 21 Qg3 Rf7, or 18 f6 Rae8! 19 e6 (19 Bg2 Qd4!) 19 ... Rxf6+ 20 Kg1 Qd4+ 21 Be3 Rg6+ 22 Bg2 Qxd5, but it was worth trying 18 e6! Rxf5+ 19 Kg1 Raf8 (19 ... Qd4+ 20 Be3 Qxb2 21 Re1 Qc3 22 Bd2 is not so clear) 20 Be3 Ne4 21 Bg2 – here there is still some fight in the position.

18 ... Qd4+! 19 Be3 Qxe5 20 Re1 Nd7!

As quickly as possible to the kingside!

21 Qc4 Kh8 22 Be4 Rae8 23 Bd4 Qf4 24 Re2 Nf6

But not 24 ... Rxe4? 25 Rxe4 Qxe4?? 26 Bxg7+ and 27 Qxe4.

25 Bxf6 gxf6 26 h3 (or 26 Re1 Rg8+ 27 Kh1 Qf3+!) **26 ... Rg8+ 0-1**

A very complicated game, conducted with genuine inspiration by Tarrasch. And yet he was already in his 62nd year, and within five years he was to give up playing ...

But in general Tarrasch preferred classical methods and he was undoubtedly a player with the class and talent of a champion. But he had his purely competitive problems (as, for instance, did Chigorin, who was unable to withstand the tension of the struggle). At decisive moments of chess history – in particular in the 1890s, when he needed to demonstrate everything of which he was capable, Tarrasch often avoided a direct confrontation with his strongest opponents, preferring not to subject his nervous system to excessive strain.

It is probable that at that time he could have defeated both Steinitz, and also even Lasker – or at least to offer him very serious resistance. But in the 20th century Lasker was already too strong for Tarrasch: the champion had retained his enormous practical strength, whereas the challenger had begun to lose his, together with his former clarity of thought ...

Test of Principles

In 1908 the German Chess Union finally managed to raise the funds for the long-awaited match for the world crown between Lasker and Tarrasch, and on 17th August in Düsseldorf, before a crowd of nearly two thousand spectators, the two players joined battle. They played to the first to win eight games; the time control was one hour for each 15 moves with an adjournment after six hours' play; the prize fund – 6,500 Marks (4,000 to the winner and 2,500 to the loser) plus an appearance fee for the champion of 7,500 Marks.

The match with Tarrasch was a severe test of Lasker's creative views. His opponent was a strict guardian of Steinitz's laws, so strict that later Tarrasch's critics unfairly called him 'dogmatic'. In fact Tarrasch, an advocate of the positional school (although, as we have seen, he also had a brilliant combinative talent), a splendid theoretician, commentator and writer, made an invaluable contribution to the development of chess. At the board he firmly upheld his principles: his ideal was play 'according to the position', the search for objectively the strongest move. Whereas Lasker's ideal was the move that was most unpleasant for the given opponent!

Initially the match promised to be competitively intriguing: Lasker won the first, in the Exchange Variation of the Ruy Lopez, and also the second, then Tarrasch responded with a spectacular win in the third. 'After two days' rest he played freshly, not displaying any psychological damage from his initial defeats.' (Lasker)

Game 53

Em.Lasker-S.Tarrasch

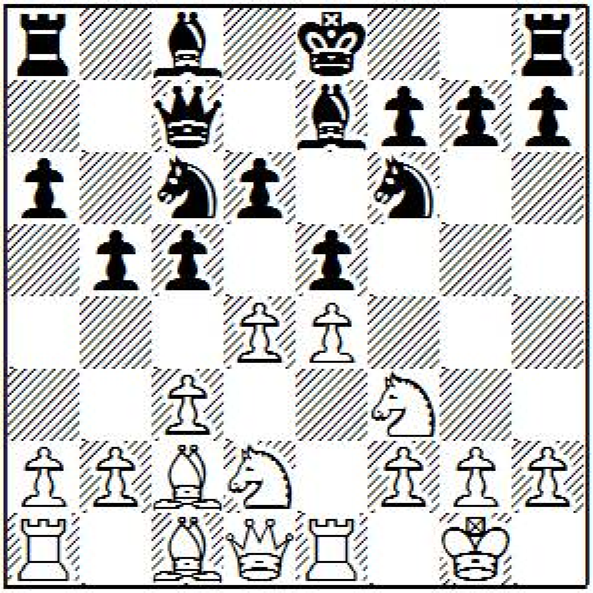
World Championship Match, Düsseldorf/Munich 1908, third game

Ruy Lopez C98

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 Na5?!

8 ... 0-0 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 Qc7 is more accurate, but at that time after 8 ... 0-0 they feared 9 d4, not knowing that 9 ... Bg4 gives Black good counterplay.

9 Bc2 c5 10 d4 Qc7 11 Nbd2 Nc6



12 h3

A non-essential move, which returns us to a theoretical position. 12 Nf1?! (*Game No.78*) is passive, but White could have played 12 d5, 12 a4 or 12 dxc5, trying to carry out Rauzer’s plan with an extra tempo.

12 ... 0-0 13 Nf1?!

A dubious decision: now Black can simply grab a pawn. The Rauzer system really is better – 13 dxc5 dxc5 14 Nf1 (14 a4!?) and Ne3. This is what Fischer played, although with alternating success: thus he lost to Kholmov (Havana 1965).

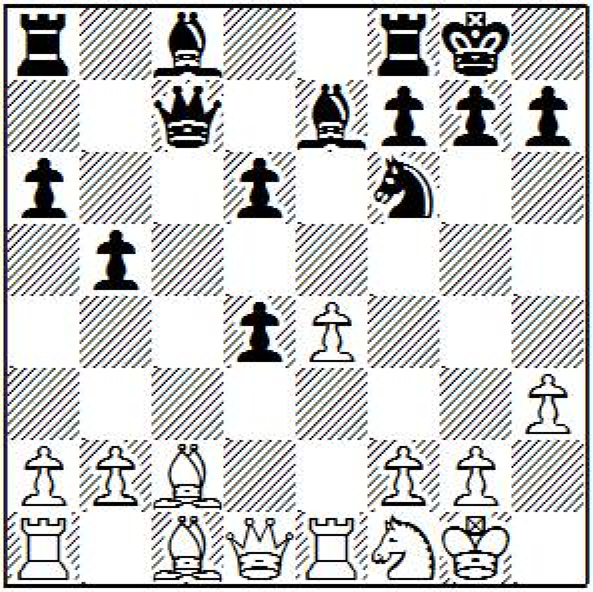
But the strongest is 13 d5! (it is because of this that nowadays ... Na5-c6 is not popular) 13 ... Nd8 14 a4 Rb8 15 axb5 axb5 16 b4, as in the games Karpov-Spassky (41st USSR Championship, Moscow 1973) and Karpov-Unzicker (Nice Olympiad 1974), which are analysed in the second volume.

13 ... cxd4 14 cxd4 Nxd4

Also good is 14 ... exd4 (with the idea of ... Qb6, ... Be6 and ... Nd7) 15 Re2 (15 b3 d5!; 15 Bg5 h6 16 Bh4 Re8 17 Rc1 Qb6 18 Qd2 Be6 19 Bb1 Ne5! Leonhardt-Rubinstein, San Sebastian 1911; 15 Ng3 g6 or 15 ... Re8 with equality) 15 ... Qb6 16 Rd2 d5 17 exd5 Nxd5 18 Nxd4 Bb4 and it is doubtful whether White has anything.

15 Nxd4 exd4

An unusual *tabiya* of this match.



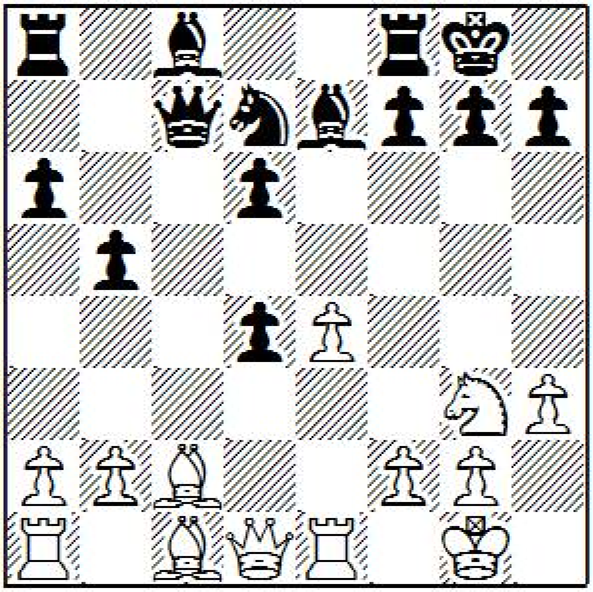
16 Ng3

In the fifth game Lasker successfully tried 16 Bg5 (16 b3 d5! is equal; 16 Bb3 Qb6 17 Bg5 Ra7!) 16 ... h6 17 Bh4 Qb6 18 Qd3 g5?! (18 ... Rd8 19 Red1 Be6 equalises) 19 Bg3 Be6 20 Rad1 Rfc8 21 Bb1 Nd7 22 e5! Nf8 23 Qf3! d5 24 Qh5 Kg7 25 f4 f5? (25 ... Ng6 was more tenacious) 26 exf6+ Bxf6 27 fxg5 hxg5 28 Be5 d3+ 29 Kh1 Ng6 30 Qxg5 Bf7 31 Ng3 Bxe5 32 Rxe5 Rh8 33 Bxd3 Ra7 34 Rde1 Kf8 35 Bxg6 Qxg6 36 Qe3 Rc7 37 Nf5 Qc6 38 Qg5 1-0. ‘For the first time I was outplayed from beginning to end.’ (Tarrasch)

I should remind you that the challenger played the fifth game in a depressed state after his heavy defeat in the fourth. Otherwise he would easily have discovered the strong reply 16 ... Qc5!, found by the analysts only after the match: 17 Bh4 Be6 18 Rc1 Qb4 19 b3 Rac8 20 Ng3 d5 with advantage to Black. Which, in my view, after 21 Bxf6 Bxf6 22 exd5 Bxd5 23 Bxh7+ Kxh7 24 Qh5+ Kg8 25 Qxd5 Rxc1 26 Rxc1 Qd2 is not really so great, although it is clear that the limit of White's dreams is a draw.

16 ... Nd7

'Weaker is 16 ... g6 17 Bb3 Qb6 18 Bh6 Re8 19 Qf3 Be6 20 Nf5! with advantage to White (Euwe-Kramer, Amsterdam 3rd matchgame 1941),' theory stated for more than half a century, but after 20 ... Bf8! this advantage is somehow not apparent.



17 Bb3?!

According to Euwe, simpler is 17 Nf5! Bf6 18 Re2 (18 Bb3 Qb6 19 Bd5 Bb7 is equal) 18 ... Qb6 (18 ... Bb7 19 Nxd4 Nc5) 19 Rd2, 'regaining the pawn with a good game.' However, here too Black is perfectly alright: 19 ... Ne5! 20 Nxd4 Nc4 (20 ... Bg5!?) 21 Rd3 Bb7 22 b3 Bxe4! (in my view, this is stronger than the 22 ... Ne5 suggested by the commentators) 23 bxc4 Bxd4! 24 Rxd4 Bxc2 etc.

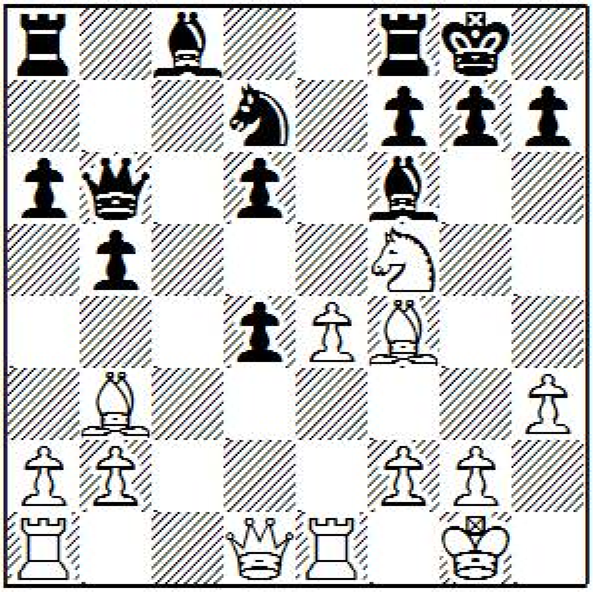
'The pawn could have been regained without great effort, if that had been my intention,' writes Lasker. 'But I was enticed by an attack, since the temptation was very great. The attack did not succeed, and this decided the outcome of the game.’

17 ... Qb6

17 ... g6 is also possible, allowing White to regain the d4-pawn. The weakness at d6 is balanced by the weakness at e4, and Black has quite a good position (which was demonstrated with particular success in similar set-ups by Keres).

18 Nf5 Bf6 19 Bf4?!

Schlechter quite reasonably suggested 19 Bd5 Ra7 20 b3, to which Tarrasch replied 20 ... Ne5 21 Bb2 Bxf5 22 exf5 d3 (with the threat of ... Nf3+ and ... Bxb2), although here 23 Rb1! (but not 23 Bxe5? Bxe5 24 Rc1 Qd4 and Black wins) 23 ... Rc7 24 Bxe5 Bxe5 25 Qxd3 would still have maintained the balance. Therefore, in my view, 23 ... Rd8!? 24 Bc1 Re7 is more interesting.



19 ... Ne5!

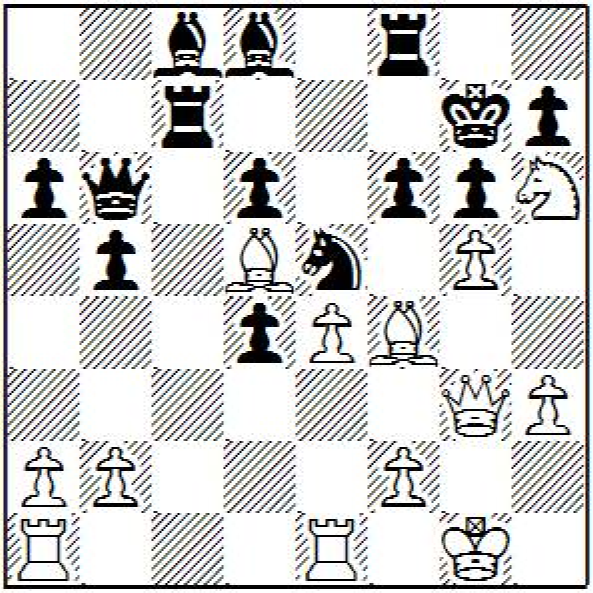
It is important to retain the dark-squared bishop! ‘The world champion had probably based his calculation on 19 ... Be5? 20 Bxe5 (*20 Qg4 g6 21 Ne7+ Kg7 – G. K.*) 20 ... dxe5? (relatively best is 20 ... Nxe5 21 Nxd4) 21 Qg4 Qf6 22 Bd5 Ra7 23 Rac1 with a strong attack.’ (Neishtadt) But in my opinion, after 23 ... Nb6 24 Rc6 Be6 things are not so clear.

20 Bd5

After the greedy 20 Nxd4 there would have followed 20 ... Nc4! 21 Ne2 (there is nothing else: 21 Bxc4? Bxd4 22 Bd5 Bxf2+; 21 Be3?! Nxe3 22 fxe3 Bb7) 21 ... Be6 with the initiative.

20 ... Ra7 21 Qb3 (threatening 22 Nxd4 Qxd4? 23 Be3 and Bxa7) **21 ... Rc7 22 g4 g6 23 Nh6+ Kg7 24 g5 Bd8 25 Qg3 f6!**

An accurate move, bringing the opponent's activity to a standstill.



26 Nf5+!?

With a heavy heart, since both 26 gxf6+ Bxf6 and 26 h4? fxg5 27 hxg5 Rxf4! 28 Qxf4 Bxg5! (29 Qxg5? Nf3+ and ... Nxg5) are bad for White.

26 ... Kh8!

There was a drawing opportunity for White after 26 ... gxf5?! 27 gxf6+ Kh8 (27 ... Kxf6?? 28 Qg5 mate) 28 Bh6 Rff7 29 Bxf7 Rxf7 30 Bg7+ Kg8 31 Bh6+.

27 Nh4 (alas, forced) **27 ... fxg5 28 Bxg5 Bxg5 29 Qxg5 d3!**

A catastrophe on f2! 'After repelling a seemingly very dangerous attack, Black launched an irresistible counter-offensive.' (Lasker) 'I was able to decide the game with the help of this rejected pawn.' (Tarrasch)

30 Kh1 (30 Qg3 Rc2; 30 Rf1 Bxh3) **30 ... Rc2 31 Re3 Rfxf2 32 Ng2**

After the cunning 32 Nf3 Black would have decided matters by 32 ... Rxf3 (but not 32 ... Nxf3?? 33 Qf6 mate) 33 Rxf3 Rh2+! 34 Kxh2 Nxf3+

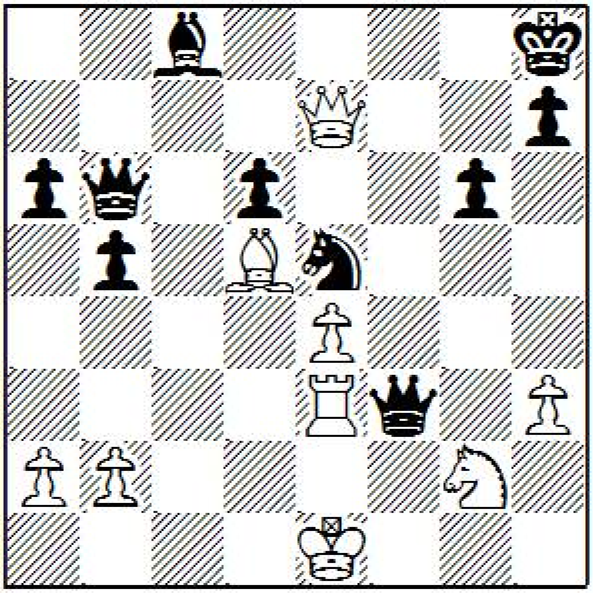
and ... Nxg5.

32 ... d2 33 Rg1 Rc1 34 Qe7 Rxg1+

34 ... d1Q 35 Qe8+ Kg7 36 Qe7+ Nf7 would also have won, but the simplest, of course, was 34 ... Rff1! 35 Qe8+ Kg7 36 Qg8+ (or 36 Qe7+ Nf7 37 Rxf1 Rxf1+ and ... d1Q) 36 ... Kh6 37 Rxf1 Rxf1+ and ... d1Q.

35 Kxg1 d1Q+ 36 Kxf2 Qf3+ 37 Ke1

A picturesque position.



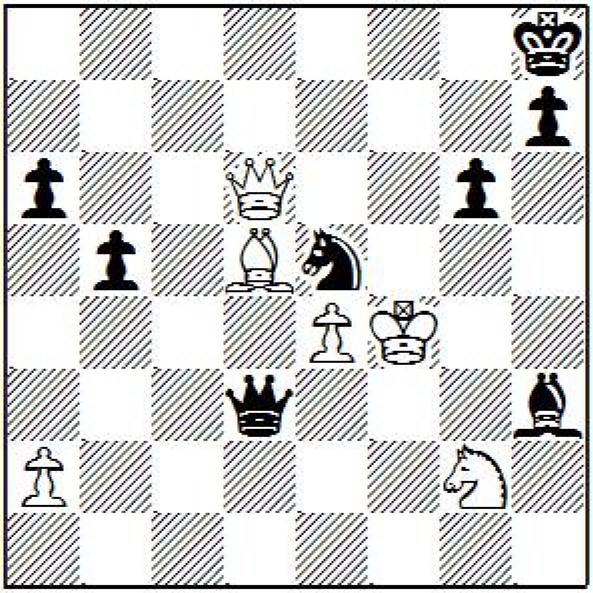
37 ... Qa5+

It is doubtful whether Alekhine, who also had occasion to give mate with two queens (*Game No.125*), would have missed 37 ... Nd3+! 38 Kd2 (38 Rxd3 Qbf2 mate) 38 ... Qa5+ 39 Kc2 (39 Kxd3 Qd1 mate) 39 ... Qxg2+ 40 Kxd3 Qgd2 mate.

38 Rc3 Bxh3 39 Qxd6 Qaxc3+ (39 ... Qg3+! was quicker) **40 bxc3 Qxc3+ 41 Ke2**

Or 41 Kf1 Qf3+ 42 Ke1 Qg3+ 43 Kd1 Bg4+ 44 Kc1 Nd3+.

41 ... Qc2+ 42 Ke3 Qd3+ 43 Kf4



43 ... g5+! 0-1

44 Kxg5 (44 Kxe5 Qc3 mate – a problem-like finish!) 44 ... Nf7+ and ... Nxd6.

The challenger had raised his head! Now much depended on which of the two players would succeed in landing the next blow. And at this moment was played one of their most famous games, determining the outcome of the match.

Game 54

S.Tarrasch-Em.Lasker

World Championship Match, Düsseldorf/Munich 1908, fourth game

Ruy Lopez C66

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 d6

Not only Lasker, but also Capablanca (cf. *Game No.81*) followed the first world champion in playing the rather passive, but solid Steinitz Defence. But Tarrasch condemned the variation with ... d7-d6, saying that ‘every cramped position harbours the germ of defeat’.

5 d4 Bd7 6 Nc3 Be7 7 Re1 exd4 8 Nxd4 Nxd4

In the second game after 8 ... 0-0! 9 Nxc6 Bxc6 (according to Steinitz, 9 ... bxc6 10 Bd3 Re8 is more solid) 10 Bxc6 bxc6 11 Ne2 Qd7? (this square is for the knight!) 12 Ng3 Rfe8 13 b3 Rad8 14 Bb2 White gained a clear advantage. But castling served Lasker faithfully in his later matches with Janowski (1909), Schlechter (1910) and Capablanca (1921).

9 Qxd4 (9 Bxd7+ Nxd7 is equal) **9 ... Bxb5 10 Nxb5 0-0**

After 10 ... a6 11 Nc3 0-0 12 Bg5 Nd7 13 Bxe7 Qxe7 14 Nd5 Qd8 15 Re3 White also has a slight initiative (Capablanca-Thomas, Hastings 1919). Incidentally, this game had a very curious finish (*Game No.87*).

11 Bg5

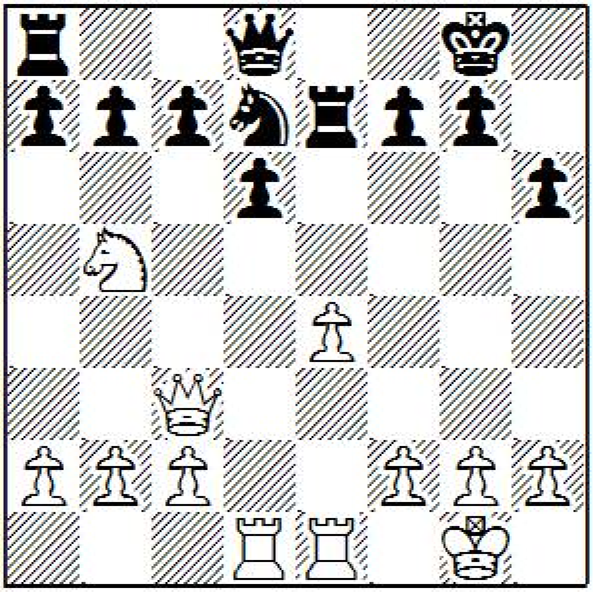
11 Bf4!? is also sensible. Capablanca suggested 11 Qc3 c6 12 Nd4, but better is 11 ... a6! 12 Nd4 Nd7 13 Nf5 Bf6 14 Qg3 Ne5 with level chances.

11 ... h6 12 Bh4 Re8 (12 ... Ng4!?) **13 Rad1** (with the threat of e4-e5) **13 ... Nd7 14 Bxe7**

If 14 Bg3, then 14 ... Bf6 15 Qc4 a6! 16 Nxc7 Rc8 (16 ... Nb6!) 17 Bxd6 Be5 18 Bxe5 (18 Qd3!) 18 ... Rxe5 19 Qd4 Qxc7! is equal (Tarrasch).

14 ... Rxe7 15 Qc3!?

Intending Nd4-f5 and at the same time hitting the c7-pawn. 15 c4 would have led to a position from the game Capablanca-Marshall (New York 4th matchgame 1909), where after 15 ... Re6 16 f4 a6 17 Nc3 Nf6 18 Nd5 Nxd5 19 exd5 Re7 a draw was agreed. Later 15 f4!? a6 16 Nc3 Re6 17 Rf1 Qf6 18 Qb4 was recommended, with some advantage.



Tarrasch must have been happy with the outcome of the opening: White has a slight but enduring advantage, and chances of increasing it without any risk. For example, 15 ... Nf8 (15 ... Nf6?! 16 e5) 16 Nd4!, and 16 ... g6 noticeably weakens the king's defences, or 15 ... Nc5 16 f3 (the tempting 16 e5?! is parried by 16 ... Qd7 17 Nd4 Rxe5 18 Rxe5 dxe5 19 Qxc5 exd4 20 Rxd4 Re8! 21 h3 Qe7 with equality) 16 ... Qd7 17 Nd4 Ne6 18 Nf5 Ree8 19 Qb4 Rab8 20 e5 d5 21 Qg4 etc.

Lasker realised perfectly well that his only chance of avoiding a prolonged and gruelling defence was to dislodge Tarrasch from his confident state. To do this he had to create something unusual, contrary to all the positional rules and standards of chess wisdom!

15 ... Re5! (a brilliant way of defending the c7-pawn) **16 Nd4!**

For the moment Tarrasch is equal to the occasion: he threatens Nf5 and f2-f4. In the event of 16 Qxc7? (16 Nxc7? Rc5 wins) 16 ... Rxb5 17 Qxd6 Rxb2 18 Qxd7 Qxd7 19 Rxd7 Rc8! Black has the better endgame.

16 ... Rc5!

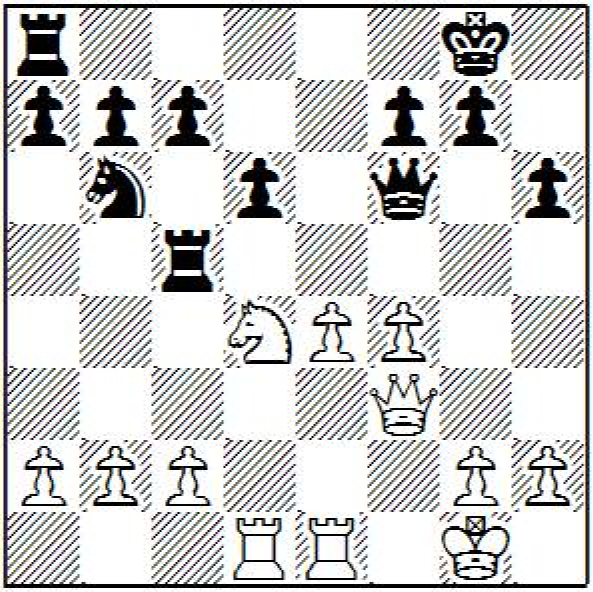
Of course, from the purely positional viewpoint this move is very dangerous: the stray rook may cause Black significant problems. But, firstly, 16 ... Nc5 17 f3 leaves White with all the advantages of his position, and secondly, the impudent behaviour of the rook is bound to upset the opponent's composure ...

17 Qb3 (if 17 Qg3, then 17 ... Qg5 is quite good) **17 ... Nb6** (17 ... a5!?) **18 f4**

Cutting off the rook's retreat. Many commentators criticised this move, saying that 'Tarrasch was influenced by Lasker's psychological thinking,' and recommending 18 Re3 or 18 Nf5. But Mark Dvoretsky's evaluation is closer to the truth: 'By advancing his pawn to f4, White takes control of the e5- and g5-squares, and prepares to cramp the opponent by Qf3, b2-b3 and c2-c4. From the fact that Tarrasch lost the game, it by no means follows that all his decisions were incorrect.'

18 ... Qf6 19 Qf3

An important moment for evaluating the correctness of Black's idea.



19 ... Re8?

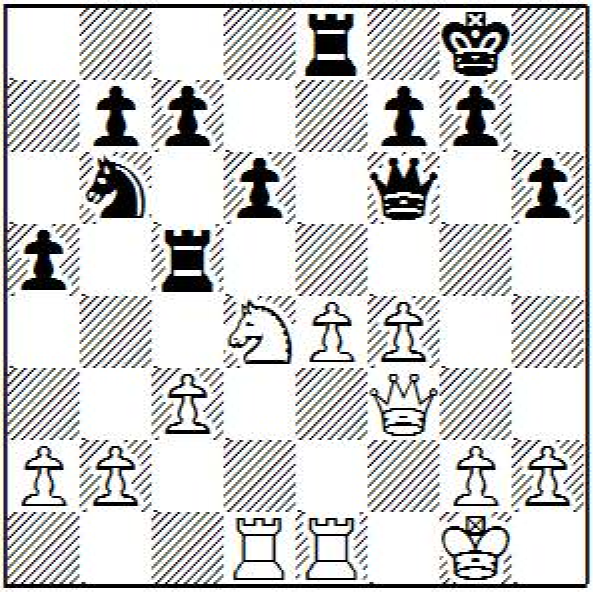
Black is apparently tempted by a trap: 20 b3? (with the logical intention of playing c2-c4) 20 ... Nd5! 21 Ne2 (21 exd5? Rxe1+ and ... Qxd4+) 21 ... Nb4, and it is now White who has problems. Later Lasker suggested 19 ... a5!? 20 b3 a4 21 c4 (after 21 b4 Rc4 22 c3 Black has an extra tempo compared with the game) 21 ... axb3 22 axb3 Rca5 (and if 23 Nb5 Qe7 24 Qf2, then 24 ... Ra2).

However, as was mentioned by Dvoretsky, the soundest way to equalise was found by a pupil from his school, Ilya Makariev – 19 ... Na4! For example: 20 e5 (20 b3?! Nc3; 20 Qb3 Nb6 21 Qf3 Na4 is equal) 20 ...

dxe5 21 Qxb7 Rd8 22 Nb3 (22 Qxa7 Rxd4 23 Rxd4 exd4 24 Qxa4 Qxf4) 22 ... Rxd1 23 Rxd1 Rxc2 24 Qe4 Qg6! 25 f5 Qc6 etc.

20 c3! (not losing his presence of mind) **20 ... a5!**

To the aid of the rook!



21 b3

If 21 Qd3 Tarrasch did not like 21 ... Rh5. '21 Nb3 Rb5 (*inferior is 21 ... Rc4?! 22 Nxa5 Ra4 in view of 23 Nxb7 Rxa2 24 b4 Rc2 25 Rc1 – G. K.*) 22 Qe2 was tempting, intending 22 ... c6 23 Nd4 Rc5 24 Qf2 with an obvious advantage. However, Black would have replied 22 ... Rf5! 23 g3 a4.' (Dvoretsky) True, but here 24 e5! dxe5 (24 ... axb3 25 exf6! etc.) 25 Nd4 is unpleasant.

21 ... a4 22 b4

Tarrasch would appear to have become nervous ... The consistent 22 c4! axb3 23 axb3 would have 'stifled' the rook at c5 and condemned Black to a difficult defence:

1) 23 ... c6 24 Nf5! (the most energetic) 24 ... d5 25 Qf2 (or 25 Qe3!? Nd7 26 Qh3 Rxe4 27 Rxe4 dxe4 28 Nd6 Makariev) 25 ... Nd7 26 g4! (according to Dvoretsky, 26 Ng3 is also good) with strong pressure;

2) 23 ... Ra5 24 Nb5! Qe7 25 Qf2 (but not 25 e5?! d5!) with the threat of Nxd6 and again the better prospects (associated with e4-e5 or Nc3-d5).

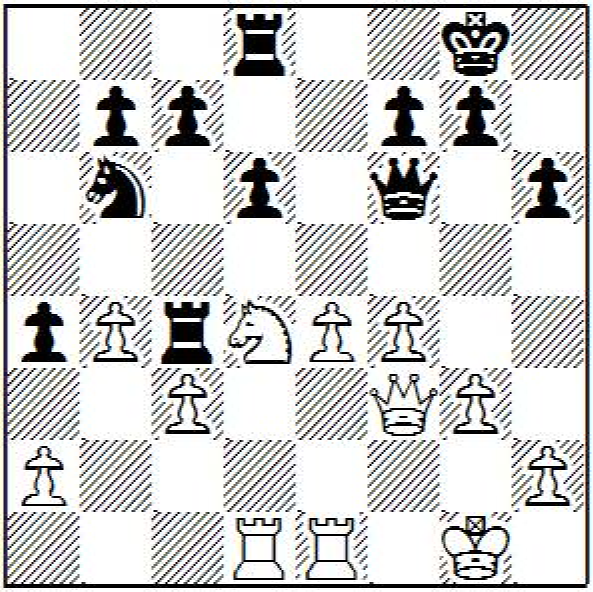
About the move in the game, which also retains a marked advantage, Dvoretsky made the following subtle comment: ‘After 22 c4 the position is clear and established, and White’s subsequent play is simpler. After 22 b4 the position is more complicated, more unusual. Lasker was superior to his opponent in tactics, and was better at finding his way in dynamic positions. In addition, he was significantly younger than Tarrasch, more robust and with greater stamina. It is clear who was favoured by the further complication of the play.’

22 ... Rc4

Although the rook is trapped, it is exerting constant pressure on c3, so that it is now doing some work!

23 g3 (if immediately 23 Nb5?! Rd8 24 Re3, then 24 ... d5! 25 e5 Qxf4 26 Qxf4 Rxf4) **23 ... Rd8**

Preparing ... c7-c5. The immediate 23 ... c5? was bad because of 24 Nb5.



24 Re3?

In Réti’s opinion, ‘White is now positionally outplayed. He has, as against the threat 24 ... c5 no defence from a positional point of view. Therefore he attempts to create one by means of a combination, which, as is usual with all combinations resorted to in a state of mere desperation, does not get home.’

It is from such components, influenced by the result of the game and the accompanying impressions, that chess mythology is created! What cause is there here for desperation?! After all, even the crude 24 e5 dxe5 25 Rxe5 retains some advantage. And if one is hoping for more, it is easy to find against ... .c7-c5 a ‘defence from the positional point of view’, and not just one! For example:

1) 24 Qe3!? (Rellstab) 24 ... Re8 (24 ... c5?! 25 Nb5; 24 ... a3 25 Nb5 Na4 26 e5! dxe5 27 fxe5 Qe7 28 Rxd8+ Qxd8 29 e6 Qe7 30 Qd3 wins for White – Dvoretsky) 25 Qd3! Rd8 26 Nb5 with the threat of e4-e5 or Re3;

2) 24 Rb1!? (Chernin), planning Qd3, Re3 and Nb5-a3, and if 24 ... c5?! (24 ... a3?! 25 Rb3), then 25 bxc5 dxc5 26 e5;

3) 24 Rd3!? (Makariev) 24 ... c5?! 25 bxc5 Rxc5 (25 ... dxc5 26 Nb5!) 26 Rb1 etc.;

4) 24 a3! (Tarrasch). In my opinion, this prophylaxis is the best – the rook at c4 is stalemated, and in the event of 24 ... c5?! 25 Nb5 cxb4 26 cxb4 the d6-pawn is extremely weak and White has a clear advantage.

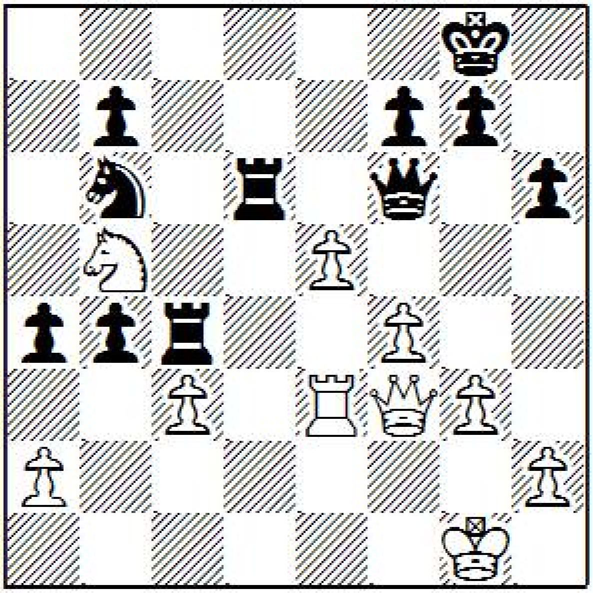
Incidentally, Tarrasch himself explained his error rather simply: ‘Up till now I had conducted the game irreproachably, but here I was seized by the unfortunate idea of a rook sacrifice, which in view of time-trouble I was unable to calculate properly.’

24 ... c5 25 Nb5?

Driven by a passionate desire to punish his opponent for his violation of the chess laws, Tarrasch ‘goes off the rails’! Later he lamented: ‘If I hadn’t been so carried away by the idea of the rook sacrifice, I would have played 25 Nc2 cxb4 26 Nxb4 with a good game thanks to the attack on the d6-pawn.’

Also suitable was Richard Teichmann’s recommendation 25 bxc5! Rxc5 (25 ... dxc5? 26 e5 or 26 Nb5) 26 Rb1 Nc4 27 Rd3 and Nc2-e3-d5 with equal chances.

25 ... cxb4 26 Rxd6? (that ‘desperate’ combination referred to earlier; the more sober 26 cxb4! Rxb4 27 Nc3 Rc8 28 Red3 Rc6 29 a3 Rb3 30 Ne2 would still have retained possibilities of a defence) **26 ... Rxd6 27 e5**



27 ... Rxf4!!

And here is the refutation. Moreover, by the irony of fate the fatal blow is struck by the abhorrent ‘hooligan’ rook! In Dvoretsky’s opinion, White’s combination ‘would have been incorrect even if this rejoinder had not been found: 27 ... Rd1+!? 28 Qxd1 Qc6 was also very strong.’ But in this case after 29 Qd8+ Kh7 30 e6! fxe6 31 Qd3+ Kg8 (31 ... g6?! 32 Nd4) 32 Qd8+ Kh7 33 Qd3+ White would have maintained the balance.

28 gxf4

Also hopeless are both 28 Qxf4 Rd1+ 29 Kf2 Qxf4+ 30 gxf4 Nd5 or 30 ... Rd2+, and 28 exf6 Rxf3 29 Rxf3 Rd1+ 30 Kg2 Rd2+ (30 ... Nd5!?) 31 Rf2 Rxf2+ 32 Kxf2 b3 or 32 ... Nd5 (Tarrasch).

28 ... Qg6+ 29 Kh1?!

No better was 29 Kf1 Qb1+ 30 Re1 Qd3+ 31 Qxd3 Rxd3 32 Ke2 Rh3 33 cxb4 Nd5! and Black wins. The rest is clear without any commentary.

29 ... Qb1+ 30 Kg2 Rd2+ 31 Re2 Qxa2 32 Rxd2 Qxd2+ 33 Kg3 a3! 34 e6 Qe1+ 35 Kg4 Qxe6+ 36 f5 Qc4+ 37 Nd4 a2 38 Qd1 Nd5 39 Qa4 Nxc3 40 Qe8+ Kh7 41 Kh5 a1Q 0-1

‘In this game, as in many others, I dug my own grave.’ (Tarrasch)

The score became 3-1 in Lasker’s favour, and the match moved on from Düsseldorf to Munich. The world champion drew some initial conclusions with a depth of thinking that was ahead of the time:

‘The two players have gained some knowledge of the force opposing them ... In a match it is necessary to understand the psychology of the opponent, in order to decide how to conduct the further offensive. Almost sub-consciously, sometimes even involuntarily, each creates in his mind a plastic image of the opponent. This work is necessary, since the concept of playing strength is a highly complex matter. How the opponent conducts himself in joy and grief, in simple and complex situations, in dubious and safe positions, in the moments of origination and ruining of hopes – all this forms his style of play. It consists of many different components. And therefore to compile the psychological resources of the two sides one has to examine a number of games, where the opponent finds himself in a variety of situations ... This knowledge is bound to come in useful in the subsequent battle.’

But for Tarrasch, in contrast to his opponent, it hardly came in useful. The fatal fourth game undermined the challenger’s confidence in his powers, and a week later in Munich, in front of one and a half thousand spectators, the match went off the rails for him: a submissive loss in the fifth game, a clearly missed win in the endgame of the sixth, and another defeat in the prolonged seventh game ...

With the score standing at 5-1 (=1), Lasker came to a halt – a crisis for the leader, typical of match situations. After fighting draws in the eighth and ninth games, Tarrasch pulled himself together and won in the 10th, playing what was probably his best game of the match. In the commentary on its opening stage, it is interesting to follow the development of chess thinking over the intervening one hundred years.

Game 55

S.Tarrasch-Em.Lasker

World Championship Match, Düsseldorf/Munich 1908, 10th game

Ruy Lopez C67

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4

After the fourth game Lasker did not play 4 ... d6 any more in the match.

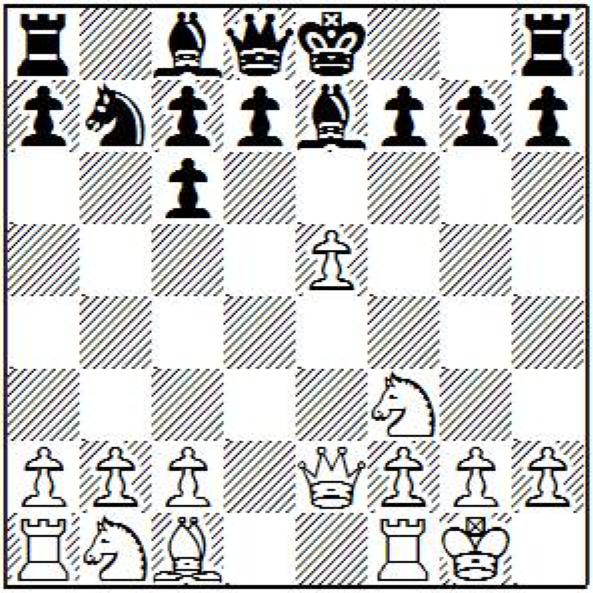
5 d4

In the 19th century, under the influence of Steinitz they also played 5 Re1 Nd6 6 Nxe5, but after 6 ... Be7 7 Bd3 0-0 8 Nc3 Nxe5 9 Rxe5 c6 10 b3 Ne8! 11 Bb2 d5 12 Qf3 Bf6 13 Re2 Nc7 (Steinitz-Zukertort, USA 14th matchgame 1886) or 8 ... Ne8!? 9 Nd5 Bf6 10 Ng4 d6 (Janowski-Lasker, Nuremberg 1896) Black has no problems.

5 ... Be7

After the drama in his game with Tarrasch in Hastings 1895, Lasker's attachment to 5 ... Nd6 had cooled (*Game No.47*).

6 Qe2! Nd6 7 Bxc6 bxc6 8 dxe5 Nb7



8 ... Nf5 9 Qe4! g6 is regarded as a sideline because of 10 Nd4 (10 Nc3!?; 10 b3!?) 10 ... Nxd4 11 Qxd4 0-0 12 Bh6 Re8 13 Nc3 (Tarrasch-Taubenhaus, Monte Carlo 1903). However, better is 11 ... d5!, as my former assistant, grandmaster Vladimirov liked to play (cf. *Shakhmaty v SSSR* 1979, No.12, p.23).

9 Nc3

The main plan. In the ancient matches Neumann-Anderssen (Berlin 1864-65) 9 Be3 0-0 10 Rd1 Qe8 11 Nc3 Nd8! and 11 ... d5!? 12 Nd4 Nc5

13 f4 Ne6 were tried many times, as a result of which the entire variation with 4 ... Nxe4 was called the Berlin Defence.

9 c4 0-0 (Zukertort-Anderssen, Berlin 1st matchgame 1868) 10 Nc3 has also been known for a long time, for example: 10 ... Nc5 11 Be3 (11 b3 f6! Tal-Smyslov, Moscow 1971) 11 ... Ne6 12 Rad1 f6 13 Nd4 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 fxe5 15 Qxe5 with a microscopic advantage (Petrosian-Ivkov, Moscow-Belgrade match 1978), or 10 ... f6 11 Re1 (11 Be3 Qe8!; 11 Bd2!? Tal-Panno, Rio Hondo 1987) 11 ... fxe5 12 Nxe5 Bf6 13 Bf4 (13 Qh5 Nc5!?) 13 ... Bxe5 14 Bxe5 d6 15 Bd4 Qh4 (15 ... Bf5!?) 16 Qd2 Qf4 17 Re3 Nd8! 18 Ne4 Ne6 19 Bc3 Bd7 with equal chances (Tal-Dorfman, 44th USSR Championship, Moscow 1976).

But the game Pillsbury-Lasker (St Petersburg 1895/96) went 9 b3 0-0 10 Bb2 (10 Ba3!? Romanishin) 10 ... d5 11 exd6 cxd6 12 Nbd2 Bf6 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 with an equal position, although after 14 Rfe1 Nc5 15 Ne4 Nxe4 16 Qxe4 Bd7?! (16 ... d5) 17 c4 Rfe8 18 Qd4 Rxe1+ 19 Rxe1 Qxd4 20 Nxd4 Kf8 21 Kf1 a5? 22 a4! Re8 23 Rxe8+ Kxe8 24 Ke2 White obtained a favourable endgame and converted it into a win.

9 ... 0-0

9 ... Nc5 10 Nd4 Ba6?! is premature on account of 11 Qg4! Bxf1 12 Qxg7 Rf8 13 Kxf1 (Showalter-Tarrasch, Vienna 1898).

10 Re1!

Pillsbury’s idea: White hinders ... d7-d5. After 10 Nd4 in the game Winawer-Lasker (Nuremberg 1896) there followed 10 ... Bc5! 11 Nf5? (11 Rd1 Qe8 12 Bf4 Nd8! 13 Bg3 Rb8 14 Rab1 Ne6 15 Nf5 f6! equalises, Kostro-Smyslov, Leipzig Olympiad 1960) 11 ... d5 12 Qg4 Bxf5 13 Qxf5 Re8 14 Bf4 Bd4! 15 Rfe1 Nc5 16 Rad1 Bxc3 17 bxc3 Qc8! with advantage to Black.

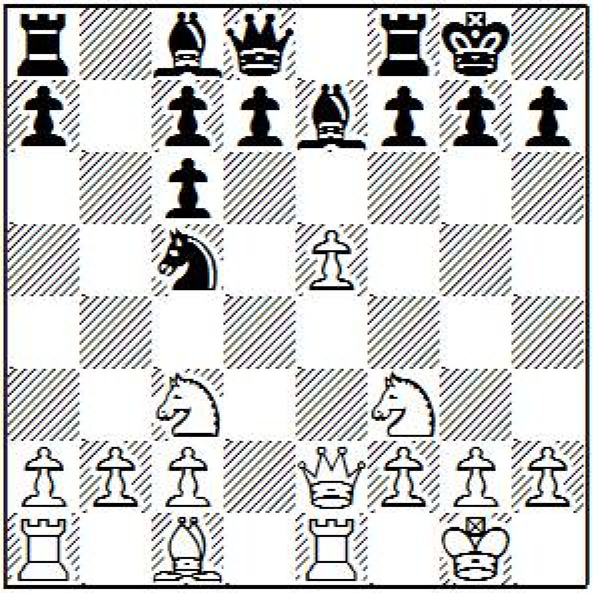
10 Rd1 also promises little in view of 10 ... d5 (Tal-Pachman, Moscow 1967) or 10 ... Nc5 11 Bf4 Ne6 12 Bg3 d5! (Shirov-Timman, Dordrecht 1999).

10 ... Nc5

Immediately activating the ‘bad’ knight. After 10 ... Re8 (Pillsbury-Lasker, London 1899) Black has 11 Qc4!? Nc5 12 Ng5 (Chigorin’s idea; if 12 Bg5 Ba6?! – 12 ... d5! – 13 Bxe7 Bxc4 14 Bxd8 Raxd8 15 Rad1 with the better endgame, Hübner-Spassky, Venice 1st matchgame 1988) 12 ... Bxg5 (according to Fine, more solid is 12 ... Rf8 13 Nce4 Ba6 14 Qc3 Nxe4 15

Nxe4 f5 16 Nc5 Bxc5 17 Qxc5) 13 Bxg5 Qxg5 14 Qxc5 Re6 (14 ... Qe7!?) 15 Qd4! with pressure (Schlechter-Janowski, Paris 1900).

Other possibilities are 10 ... f6 11 Bf4! (Teichmann-Tarrasch, Monte Carlo 1902) and 10 ... d5 (nevertheless!) 11 exd6 Bxd6 12 Bg5 Qd7 13 Rad1 (Martinez-Lasker, USA simultaneous exhibition 1902) or 13 Ne4 c5 14 Rad1 (Balashov-Smyslov, Leningrad 1977), and Black still has to fight for equality.

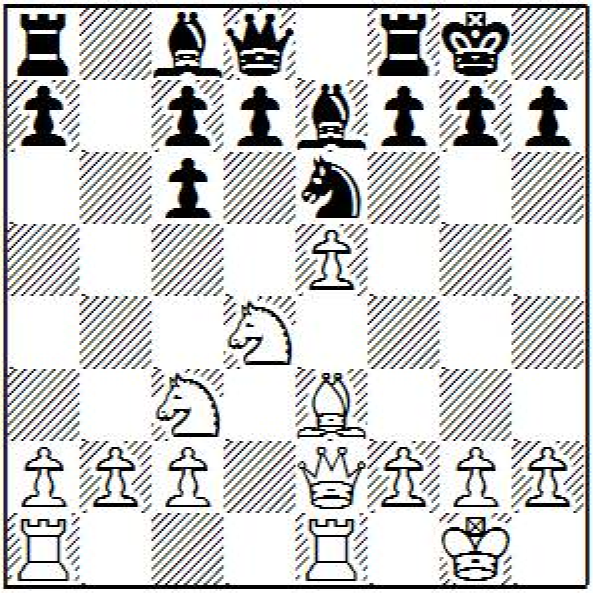


11 Nd4

Fashionable nowadays is 11 Bf4!? Ne6 12 Bg3 Rb8 (12 ... d5 13 exd6 and Rad1; 12 ... f5 13 exf6) 13 b3 f5 14 exf6 Bxf6 15 Ne5 Bxe5 16 Qxe5 (Geller's plan), and also 11 Be3 Ne6 12 Rad1!? with some initiative for White after both 12 ... f6 13 Nd4 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 fxe5 15 Bxe5 (Geller-Lengyel, Moscow 1975), and 12 ... d5 13 exd6 cxd6 14 Nd4 Bd7 15 Nf5 d5 16 Nxe7+ Qxe7 17 Qd2! (Karpov-Korchnoi, Merano 2nd matchgame 1981) or 14 ... Nxd4 15 Bxd4 Re8 16 Qf3 d5 17 Na4 Bf8 18 Bc5 (Tal-Portisch, Brussels 1988).

11 ... Ne6 12 Be3

White has also played both 12 Nf5 f6! and 12 Nxe6 fxe6 13 b3 (13 Ne4 d5! equalises; 13 Be3 d5 14 Na4 d4!? 15 Rad1 c5 16 Bc1 Qd5! etc.) 13 ... Qe8 (13 ... Bb7!? and ... c6-c5) 14 Be3!? (14 Bb2 Bb7 15 Qg4 ½-½ Spassky-Smyslov, Tilburg 1979) 14 ... Rf5 15 Ne4! (Anand-Timman, Wijk aan Zee 1999), and Black has to choose between 15 ... Rxe5 16 Bf4 Rf5 17 Bxc7 Qf8 and 15 ... Bb7.



12 ... Nxd4

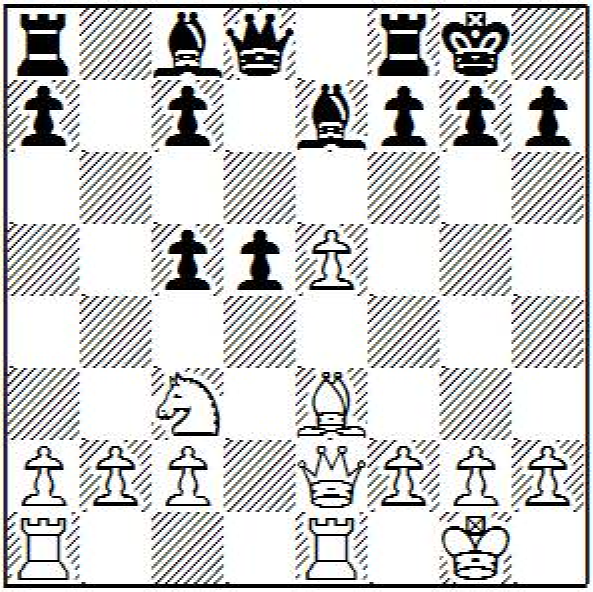
Nowadays they also employ the sharp sacrifice of the a7-pawn – 12 ... Rb8, which has been known since the 1880s. For example: 13 Nxe6 fxe6 14 Bxa7 Rb4!? 15 Be3 Bb7 16 b3 c5! with counterplay, 13 b3 Bb4 14 Nxe6 (14 Qd2!?) 14 ... fxe6 15 Qd2 Rb5!, or 13 Rab1 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 c5 15 Be3 d5 16 exd6 Bxd6 etc.

13 Bxd4 c5!

In the given situation 13 ... d5?! (13 ... f6?! 14 Rad1 also failed to establish itself, Zukertort-Winawer, London 1883) is much weaker because of 14 Na4! Bb4 15 c3 Ba5 16 Qh5 Bb6 17 Re3 Be6 18 Rg3 Kh8 19 Rd1 Qe7 20 b4 with a solid blockade of the c5-square (Pillsbury-Tarrasch, Vienna 2nd matchgame 1898).

‘The move in the game is the start of the Vianna variation, named the “Rio de Janeiro Variation” after the player’s home.’ (Keres) A year before the match, Teichmann brought the ‘Brazilian’ idea 13 ... c5! from a tour of South America. As Lasker wrote, ‘this defence has come into theory, to settle there for a long time.’

14 Be3 d5



15 exd6 Bxd6 (of course, not 15 ... cxd6? 16 Bxc5) **16 Ne4!**

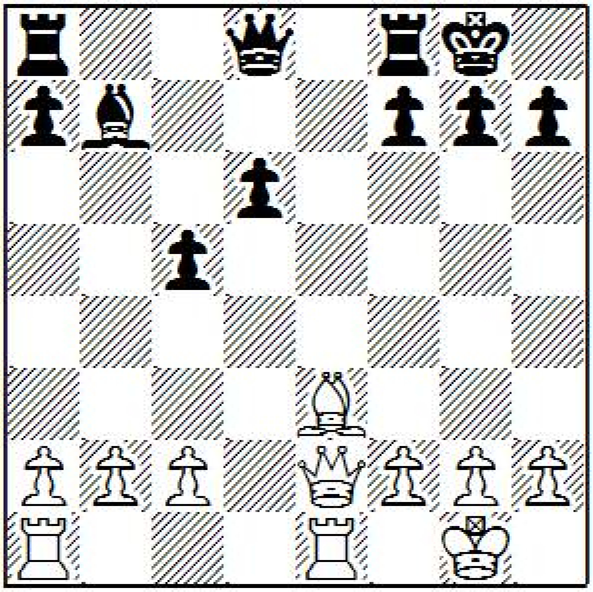
Probably the strongest. The eighth game went 16 Qh5 Bb7 17 Rad1 (17 Bxc5? g6) 17 ... Re8 18 Nb5 (18 f3 is slightly better) 18 ... Qf6 19 Nxd6 cxd6 20 Bc1 Re6 with level chances.

In the 14th game Tarrasch tried 16 Rad1 and after 16 ... Qh4?! 17 h3 Qb4 18 Bc1 he gained an advantage, but correct is 16 ... Bb7! (16 ... Qf6!? 17 Qh5 Rb8 18 Bc1 Qf5 equalises, Capablanca-Réti, Vienna 1914) 17 Bf4 (17 Bxc5? Qg5) 17 ... Re8 with equality, for example: 18 Qxe8+ Qxe8 19 Rxe8+ Rxe8 20 Bxd6 cxd6 21 f3 Re6 22 Kf2 Bc6 23 Nd5 Kf8 24 Ne3 g6 25 c4 Ke7 26 Rd3 a5 27 Ra3 a4 28 Nd1 g5! 29 Nc3 Rh6 30 Nxa4 Rxh2 when the draw is not far off.

16 ... Bb7

‘But not 16 ... Bxh2+ 17 Kxh2 Qh4+ 18 Kg1 Qxe4 19 Bxc5 Qxe2 20 Rxe2 with clearly the better endgame for White.’ (Keres) But in my opinion, after 20 ... Ba6! (20 ... Rd8?! 21 Re7!) this statement demands proof: 21 Re7 (21 Rd2!?) 21 ... Rfc8 22 Rae1 Bc4 23 Bxa7 (23 b3 Be6) 23 ... h6! is equal (Vukic recommended 23 ... Bxa2? 24 b3 Bb1, but after 25 Rxb1 Rxa7 26 Rd1 Black can resign).

17 Nxd6!? (White gets rid of the dangerous bishop, not worrying about the resulting opposite-colour bishops) **17 ... cxd6**



18 c4

A new move – fixing the backward d6-pawn. In the source game Marco-Teichmann (Ostend II 1907) after 18 Bf4 d5 19 Qb5 Qb6 20 Qxb6 axb6 21 Bc7 b5 things ended in a draw.

Out of recent attempts I should mention 18 Rad1 Qf6 19 f3!? (Tseshkovsky-Ivkov, Bled/Portoroz 1979) and 18 Qg4 Qf6 19 Qg5!? Qg6 20 Qxg6 hxg6 21 Rad1 Rfd8 22 f3 with a small plus in the ending (Tseshkovsky-Hort, Petrosian Memorial, Moscow 1999).

18 ... Qf6

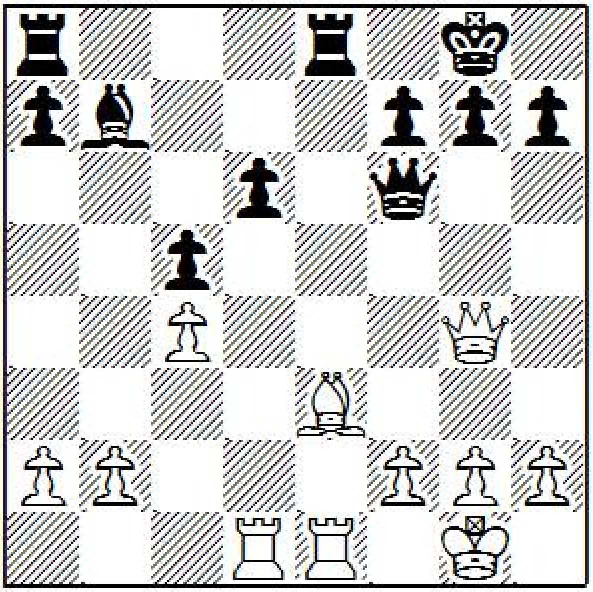
Also possible is 18 ... Re8 19 f3 (19 Rad1 Re6) 19 ... Qh4 20 b3 Re6 21 Qd2 Rg6 22 Bf4 Qf6 23 Qe3 h5!? 24 Rad1 Rd8 25 Rd3 h4 26 Red1 h3 with counterplay (Selesnieff-Réti, Berlin 1919).

19 Rad1 Rfe8

Eighty years later 19 ... Rae8 20 f3 Re6 21 Qf2 Rfe8 22 b3 h6 with equal chances was also played.

20 Qg4!

Precise calculation. The problem of defending with Black in such ‘dull’ positions is that to maintain the balance he all the time has to find virtually the only moves. And Lasker is unable to withstand the tension ...



20 ... Bc6?

In Tarrasch's opinion, the decisive mistake. Also bad is 20 ... Qxb2? 21 Rb1 Qc3 (or 21 ... Rxe3 22 fxe3 Qc3 23 Re2) 22 Rec1 Bc8 (if 22 ... Qa3 there follows not 23 Rxb7? Qxc1+, but 23 Bh6! g6 24 Qf4 with the threats of Qf6 and Rxb7) 23 Qf3 Rb8! 24 Qc6! Rxe3 25 Qxd6! and wins.

Of course, 20 ... Re6! should have been played. 'In this case White's position is also better in view of the unpleasant weakness of the black d6-pawn, but with correct defence Black should nevertheless be able to gain a draw thanks to the opposite-coloured bishops.' (Keres) In my opinion, this is not hard to do, for example: 21 Bf4 (21 Re2?! Rae8 22 Red2? Qe5! or 22 Qg3 Qg6!; 21 b3 Rae8 22 Qg3 h6 is equal) 21 ... Rae8 22 Rxe6 Rxe6 23 h4 (23 b3? Qe7!) 23 ... h6 or 21 Qf4 Qg6 22 f3 Rae8 23 Bf2 Rxe1+ 24 Rxe1 Rxe1+ 25 Bxe1 Qd3 26 Bc3 f6 with equal chances in each case.

21 Re2!

After this move Lasker thought for almost a whole hour ...

21 ... Re4?

Not without reason do they say that mistakes comes in pairs. 21 ... Re6? no longer worked because of 22 Bg5, but better, nevertheless, was Vukic's recommendation 21 ... h6!? 22 Red2 Rad8 23 Qg3 (23 Qf4 Qxf4 24 Bxf4 Re6 is equal) 23 ... Re6 24 h4 (24 Bxc5? Qf5 and ... Rg6) 24 ... Qe7 25 h5 Kh8, 'and Black's defences hold: 26 Bxc5? Re1+ (*let us continue: 27*

Kh2 Rxd1 28 Bd4 f6 29 Rxd1 Qe2 30 Rc1 Qxh5+ 31 Kg1 with equal chances – G. K.), or 26 Bf4 d5 27 cxd5 Bxd5 28 Rxd5? Re1+!' (Neishtadt) However, after 28 Be3 White has a clear advantage, and so instead of 27 ... Bxd5? correct is 27 ... Re1+ 28 Rxe1 Qxe1+ 29 Kh2 Rxd5 30 Rxd5 Bxd5.

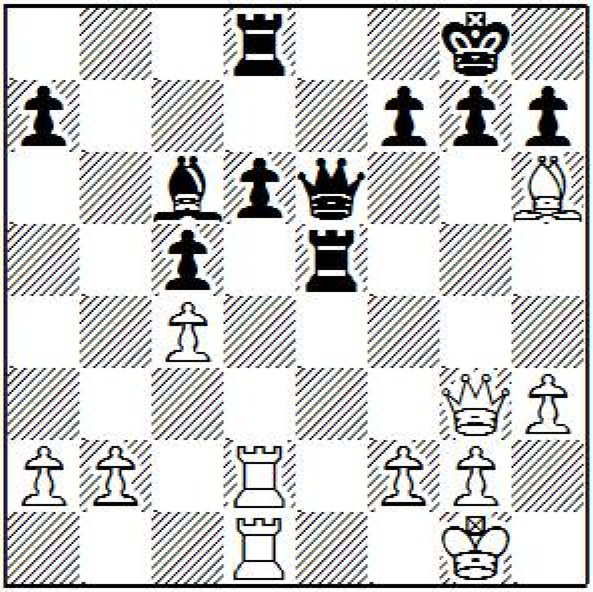
22 Qg3 Qe6

If 22 ... Rxc4, then 23 Rxd6 Rd8 24 Rxd8+ Qxd8 25 h3! with the threats of Rd2 and Bh6.

23 h3!

'Possible was 23 Rxd6 (23 Qxd6?! Rg4!) 23 ... Qxc4 24 Red2 with the initiative, since here 24 ... Rg4? does not work in view of 25 Rd8+ Be8 26 Qxg4! Qxg4 27 Rxa8.' (Neishtadt) But after 24 ... Qxa2 25 h3 Re6 things are not so clear.

23 ... Rd8 (Schlechter proposed 23 ... Qxc4 24 Bh6 g6 25 Rxe4 Qxe4, but after 26 Rxd6 White is threatening Rxc6!, and if 26 ... Re8, then 27 Kh2 with the threat of f2-f3) **24 Red2 Re5 25 Bh6!**



25 ... Qg6?

Of course, 25 ... Qxh6? 26 Qxe5 was bad for Black, but he could have prolonged the resistance by 25 ... g6 26 Bf4 Re1+ 27 Rxe1 Qxe1+ 28 Kh2 etc. Now, however, almost as in draughts, one after another Black loses his d6- and c5-pawns.

26 Bf4! Re6 27 Bxd6 Qh5 (Tarrasch considered 27 ... h5 to be somewhat more tenacious) **28 Qg4**

But not 28 Be5?? Qxd1+! 29 Rxd1 Rxd1+ 30 Kh2 Rg6 and Black wins.

28 ... Qxg4 29 hxg4 Re4 30 Bxc5 Rxd2 31 Rxd2 h5 32 Rd6 1-0

'The result of this game again inspired me,' Tarrasch declared and ... he ignominiously lost the next, 11th game. But then he won the 12th, and in a titanic struggle! The score became 6-3 (=3). Somewhat shaken, Lasker took a four-day break ...

In his report on the game he had just lost (both players covered the match in the press) the world champion wrote that he 'intends to explain his defeats, present them in the correct light and ... philosophise on their causes (shades of the Steinitz-Chigorin School!). And indeed he gave a detailed psychological analysis of the struggle, explaining why the win for his opponent, who repulsed a seemingly dangerous attack, was justified: 'He parried a desperate attack very skilfully and found a saving idea ... Chess is just. He who plays correctly and seeks, he will always find. Perhaps this is the most splendid thing in our ancient strategic game.'

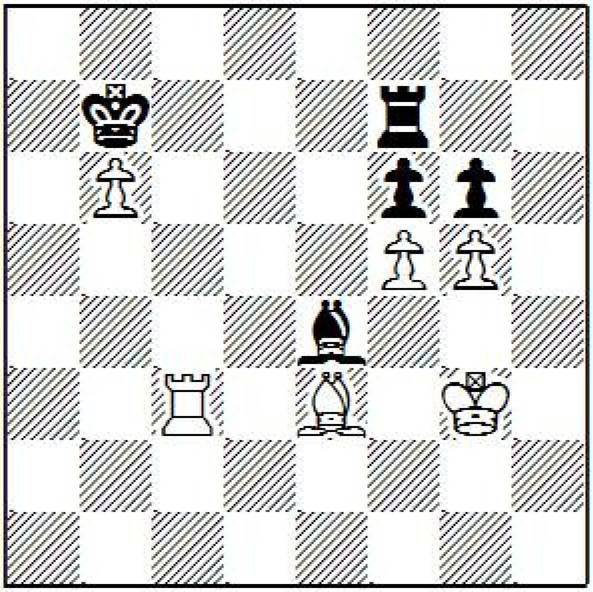
The resumption of play showed that Tarrasch's powers were already on the wane. In the 13th game the champion chose **1 d4** for the first time in the match, and the challenger replied with the defence that bears his name – **1 ... d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5.** By the 20th move Black had a splendid attacking position, when suddenly he removed a knight from the centre and his position became almost hopeless. Lasker converted his advantage and took the score to 7-3. 'Now, when my opponent only had to win a single game more,' wrote Tarrasch, 'I played as though a Sword of Damocles was raised above my head.'

Nevertheless the 14th game was the most protracted in all of Lasker's match experience: obtaining an endgame with an extra pawn, Tarrasch tormented his opponent for three days and 119 moves! There was a moment when in a sharp time scramble Lasker made a couple of errors and was a step away from defeat.

Game 56

S.Tarrasch-Em.Lasker

World Championship Match, Düsseldorf/Munich 1908, 14th game



60 gxf6?

The ill-starred last move before the time control! ‘60 Ra3 would have won quickly, for example: 60 ... Kc6 61 Ra7 Rf8 (61 ... Rxa7 62 bxa7 Kb7 63 gxf6 Bd5 64 fxg6 or 62 ... Kd7 63 fxg6 Ke7 64 g7) 62 Rc7+ Kb5 63 Bc5 Rg8 64 gxf6; 60 ... Kb8 61 Ra7 Rf8 (or 61 ... Bb7 62 fxg6 Rg7 63 Bd4 Rxg6 64 Bxf6) 62 gxf6 Rxf6 63 Bf4+ Kc8 64 Rc7+ Kd8 65 Bg5; 60 ... Kc8 61 fxg6 Bxg6 62 Ra8+ Kb7 63 Ra7+ Kc6 64 Rxf7 Bxf7 65 gxf6. The continuation chosen by me led to the win of the bishop, but not the game.’ (Tarrasch)

60 ... Rxf6 61 Rc7+ Ka6 62 Ra7+ Kb5 63 b7 Bxb7 64 Rxb7+ Kc4 65 Kf4 gxf5 66 Ke5 Rf8 and Black gained a draw.

After this there followed a nervy draw in the 15th game, and then a terrible time-trouble blunder by the challenger in the 16th – and the match ended in a convincing win for Lasker: +8 -3 =5.

Tarrasch was thus unable to find the key to his amazingly resourceful opponent. In particular he was ruined by his straightforward adherence to the theory of ‘correct moves’, without taking account of psychological factors. In searching for the ephemeral absolute truth he went too far, lost control over the situation and, to put it simply, made more mistakes than his opponent.

It is a pity that their match did not take place 10-15 years earlier ... The failure of the 46-year-old Tarrasch was neatly described by the remarkable chess author and master Eugene Znosko-Borovsky: ‘Intellect, erudition, technique, talent – all that fate extravagantly bestowed on him, proved insufficient in a meeting with the inner force, the foreseeing intuition, the originality of a genius.’

A Tough Nut

Other possible contenders for the throne at that time were two prominent positional players, the Hungarian Géza Maróczy (1870-1951) and the Austrian Karl Schlechter. But whereas the first of these did not manage to arrange a match with the champion, the second, the victor of Ostend 1906, who played successfully in 1908 in the major tournaments in Vienna and Prague (with an overall score of +18 -1 =19), immediately issued a challenge to Lasker, who in reply gave his agreement in principle. But first he had to play Tarrasch, and the Lasker-Schlechter match was deferred until January 1910.

During this time a number of interesting events occurred, the main one being the Chigorin Memorial, the highly important international tournament in St Petersburg (February 1909). Schlechter was paired with White against Lasker in the very first round, and was completely outplayed by his formidable opponent (in the same Steinitz Defence to the Ruy Lopez). Apparently the only thing that saved the challenger was the fact that the champion was out of practice ...

However, Lasker ultimately found his earlier form, which is not something that can be said about Schlechter, if one only looks at the results of the St Petersburg tournament: 1-2. Lasker and Rubinstein – 14½ out of 18(!); 3-4. Duras and Spielmann – 11; 5. Bernstein – 10½; 6. Teichmann – 10; 7. Perlis – 9½; 8-10. E. Cohn, Salwe and Schlechter 9 etc. This poor showing by the challenger displeased the champion, who declared that their match was unlikely to be of interest to the chess world. However, later Lasker admitted that Schlechter’s failure had been caused by his illness during the tournament, and he spoke highly of the mastery of his future opponent.

In Paris that same autumn, Lasker crushed Janowski in a series of 10 ‘training’ games (+7 -1 =2), since the Franco-Russian master had found a rich patron, the artist Leo Nardus, who invested 6,000 Francs in this venture.

It was proposed that the Lasker-Schlechter match (Vienna/Berlin 1910) would be the best of 30 games, but due to financial problems the number of games was reduced to 10 – an unprecedented occurrence! Also for the first time the full text of the match agreement was not published. Only a few of its points were leaked to the press: the prize fund – 3,000 Krona from Vienna and 2,000 Marks from Berlin; the time control – an hour for 15 moves with an interval every two hours ... However, to all appearances, one of the points stated that to win the title the challenger had to gain an advantage of two points, and that if Schlechter were to win by one point (5½-4½) the match would be declared ... drawn.

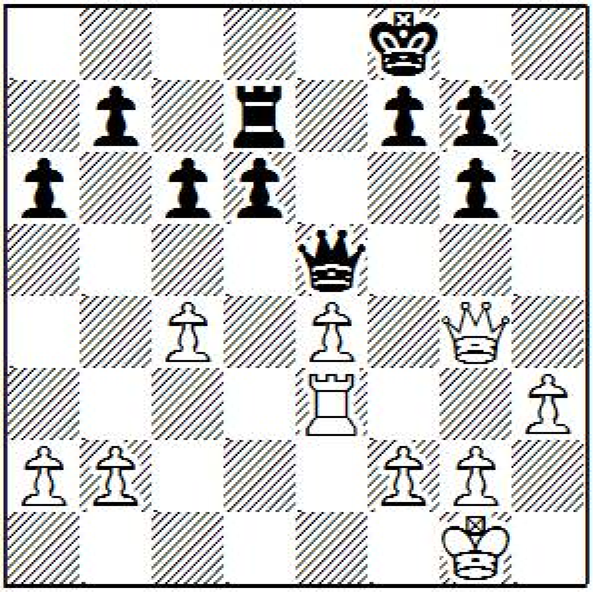
This was a very difficult match for Lasker! Already in the first game he only just escaped in a rook ending where he was two pawns down, and in the second, after a mistake in the opening, he was obliged to gain a draw by finding the only moves. And although the champion then dominated in most of the games, Schlechter proved to be a tough nut to crack: an outstanding follower of the Steinitz School and an expert on the openings, he played with unusual tenacity, not succumbing to psychological tricks, and he was very hard to break down. Later Botvinnik explained this by the fact that ‘to some extent Schlechter’s play was faceless, and Lasker had nothing to hook on to.’

The first game to finish decisively, after four draws at the start, was the fifth. From the opening (once again a Steinitz Defence in the ‘Spanish’) a dead drawn position was reached, but Lasker began playing for a win with Black, devising an amazing manoeuvre of his king to the queenside. His opponent was completely outplayed, but in time-trouble the picture suddenly changed ...

Game 57

K.Schlechter-Em.Lasker

World Championship Match, Vienna/Berlin 1910, 5th game



27 ... Ke8!?

‘Black fearlessly sends off his king on a Steinitz-like journey.’ (*Krefelder Zeitung* 13 February 1910) What self-belief and imagination he needed to have!

28 Qe2 Kd8 29 Qd2 Kc7 30 a3 (30 a4!?) **30 ... Re7 31 b4**

Here 31 a4 was more circumspect. ‘White begins something resembling a pawn storm, intending to create some threats to the black king. Lasker boldly accepts the challenge.’ (Romanovsky)

31 ... b5!

An excellent sealed move! ‘Played fearlessly and energetically, as befits a great master. Although in the process the king’s position is exposed, the white a3-pawn becomes backward. And Black hopes to create a passed pawn, by subsequently advancing his c-pawn.’ (Tarrasch) After the adjournment there followed:

32 cxb5

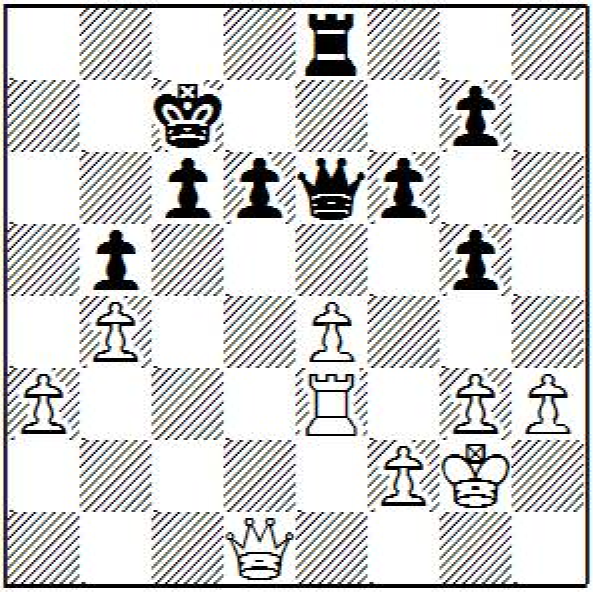
If 32 Qd3, then 32 ... Qa1+ 33 Kh2 g5 is good, while Romanovsky gives 33 ... Qa2!? 34 c5 dxc5 35 bxc5 Rd7 36 Qc3 Qd2! 37 Qe5+ Kb7 ‘with real winning chances’.

32 ... axb5 33 g3 g5 34 Kg2 Re8 35 Qd1 f6! (not fearing a3-a4) **36 Qb3**

A cautious line. Lipke and Tarrasch recommended 36 a4, but here too after 36 ... bxa4 37 Qxa4 Kb7 38 Qc2 (but not 38 Ra3? Qxe4+ 39 Kh2 Qd4! 40 Qa6+ Kc7 41 Qa7+ Qxa7 42 Rxa7+ Kb6 43 Rxg7 Re4 and wins – Romanovsky) 38 ... Ra8 or 38 ... Qe6 Black retains the advantage.

36 ... Qe6 37 Qd1

37 Qxe6 Rxe6 is too depressing for White. ‘In view of the weakness of the a3-pawn and the possibility of ... c6-c5, the rook ending is quite unacceptable for him.’ (Romanovsky)



37 ... Rh8! (provoking a new weakening, since 38 Qg4?! is unfavourable) **38 g4 Qc4**

‘A presumptuous queen invasion. 38 ... Ra8 should definitely have been played, suppressing White’s main, and perhaps his only chance: a3-a4.’ (Romanovsky) But perhaps Lasker simply did not consider it necessary to prevent his opponent’s dubious counterplay?

39 a4?!

On encountering difficulties, the challenger begins throwing caution to the wind. ‘A pawn sacrifice offering good chances; after 39 Qf3 Re8 40 Qf5 Re5 41 Qh7 Qf7 or 41 Qg6 Qg8 White would have had a difficult game.’

(Schlechter) However, more solid was 39 Qd2!? Ra8 40 f3 Qe6 41 Qc2 Qe5 42 Rc3 Ra6 43 Qb3 with a defensible position.

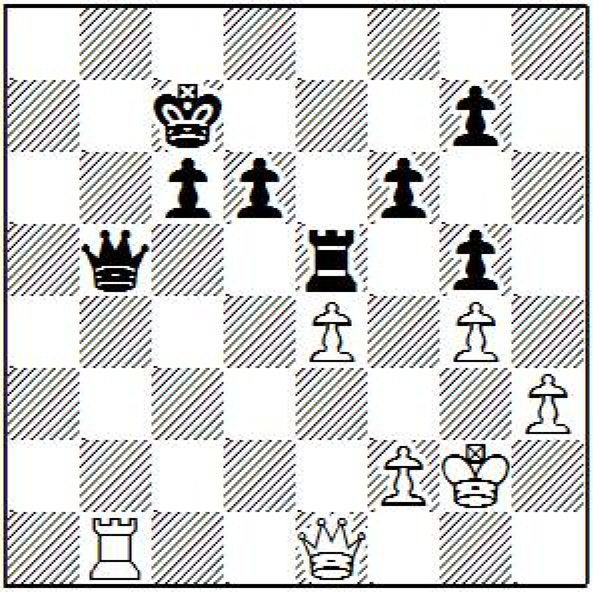
39 ... Qxb4

If 39 ... bxa4 40 Qxa4 Rb8 (Capablanca), then 41 Qa5+ Kc8 42 Qa7 Rb7 43 Qa8+ Rb8 44 Qa7 with a repetition. 39 ... Rb8!? is more interesting – after 40 axb5 Rxb5 41 Qa4 Kb7! (41 ... Qxb4 42 Qa7+ Rb7 43 Qa2 is not altogether clear) White also loses a pawn without any particular compensation: 42 Qd1 Qxb4 or 42 Kf3 Rxb4 43 Qa5 g6 etc. 'No worse was 39 ... Ra8 40 axb5 Qxb5 41 Qb3 Ra1! 42 Rd3 Kb6, and if 43 Rxd6?, then 43 ... Qf1+ 44 Kg3 Qg1+ and wins.' (Romanovsky)

40 axb5 Qxb5 41 Rb3 Qa6 42 Qd4 Re8

Preventing Qb2 and Ra3, but more importantly – centralising the rook.

43 Rb1 Re5! 44 Qb4 Qb5 (but not 44 ... Rb5? 45 Qc4!; now, however, White is simply a pawn down) **45 Qe1**

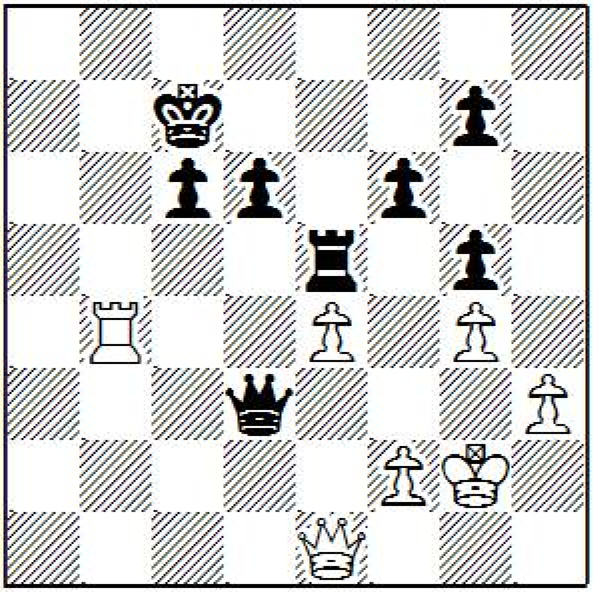


45 ... Qd3?!

A moment that is not mentioned by any of the commentators: more accurate was 45 ... Qa4! with an obvious advantage. After 46 Rb4 (or 46 f3 Rb5) 46 ... Qa5! 47 Qb1 Rb5 48 Rxb5 Qxb5 Black has a technically won position.

46 Rb4!

‘Not only defending, but also threatening the strong attacking manoeuvre Qa1. White has acquired real threats against the king.’ (Romanovsky)

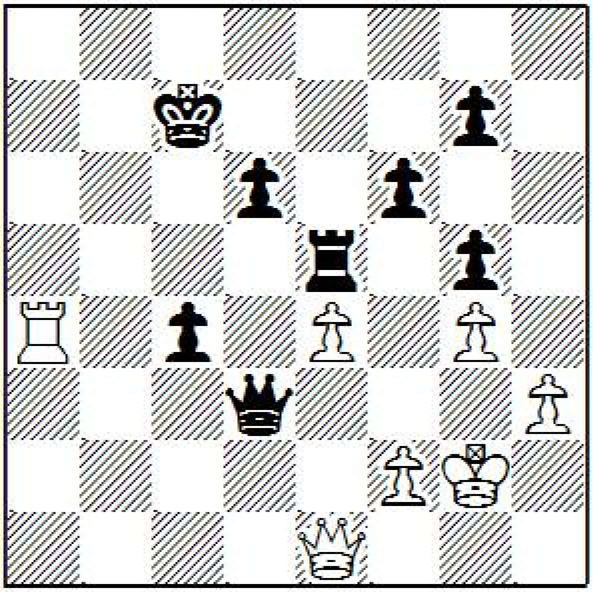


46 ... c5?!

Excessively sharp! Now White activates his queen and suddenly there are various checks and sacrifices in the air ... Capablanca suggested 46 ... Rb5!? In Romanovsky’s opinion, this move ‘is parried by 47 Ra4, and if 47 ... Rb1, then 48 Qa5+ Kd7 49 Qf5+.’ But after 47 ... Kd7! it is hard to offer White any good advice: 48 Ra7+ Ke6 etc.

‘The commentators considered the best chance to be 46 ... Ra5 with the threat of ... Ra3. However, the queen endgame after 47 Rb3 (*47 Qc1 Ra2!; 47 Rb2 Ra4! Bernstein*) 47 ... Qxb3 48 Qxa5+ Kb7 (*48 ... Qb6!? Schlechter*) 49 Qd8 Qe6 50 f3 d5 51 exd5 cxd5 52 Qa5 Qd7 53 Qb4+ Kc7 54 Qd4 is not at all simple, and it is unclear whether Black can win it. Lasker was not sure about this ... ’ (Romanovsky) But in my opinion 52 ... Qe2+! 53 Kg3 (53 Kg1 Qxf3) 53 ... Qe5+ 54 Kg2 d4 should win for Black.

47 Ra4 c4 (47 ... Kd7 was interesting, but how could Black resist taking the e4-pawn?!)

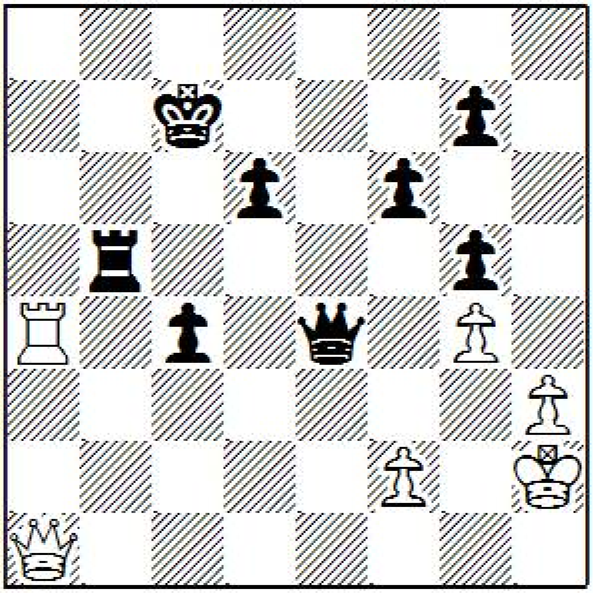


48 Qa1

White could also have considered 48 Qb4!? (48 f3?? Qc2+ and ... Qxa4) 48 ... Qxe4+ 49 Kg3 Rc5 50 Ra7+ Kc8 51 Rxg7 Qf4+ 52 Kg2 Rc7 53 Rg8+ with a sharp game, or 51 ... Qe5+ 52 Kg2 Qd5+ 53 Kg1 Rc7 54 Rg6 c3 (54 ... Qf7 55 Qb1) 55 Rh6 c2 56 Rh8+, saving himself by perpetual check.

48 ... Qxe4+ 49 Kh2 Rb5

Threatening to exchange queens, for example: 50 Ra7+? Kb8 51 Rxg7 Qe5+!



50 Qa2!!

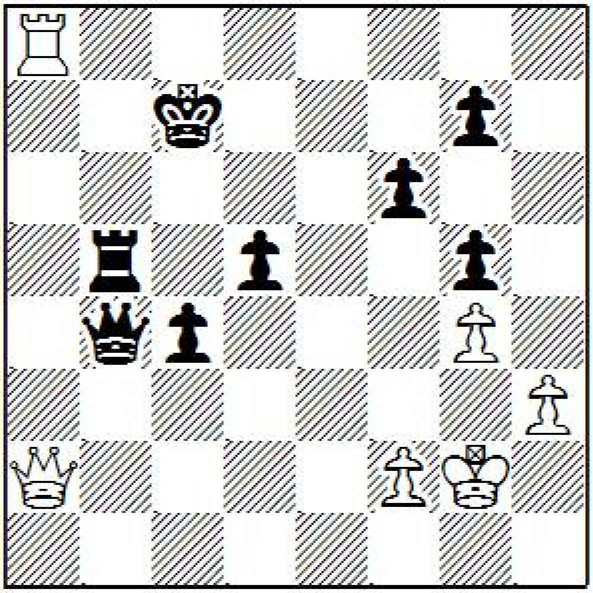
A unique resource! In a difficult position Schlechter shows incredible resourcefulness in seeking the slightest chances to sharpen the play – in which he succeeds. The threat is Rxc4+ or Ra7+ and Rxg7.

50 ... Qe5+ 51 Kg1 Qe1+ 52 Kh2 (52 Kg2!?) **52 ... d5 53 Ra8!** (with the threat of 54 Qa7+ Rb7 55 Qc5) **53 ... Qb4**

53 ... Qe5+ did not promise anything more than a draw.

54 Kg2

'Had his king already been at g2, White could have played 54 Qa6, but here this is not possible in view of 54 ... Qd6+.' (Romanovsky)



The culmination of this fierce battle: White is two pawns down, but he has occupied the a-file and is threatening to invade with his queen at a6. It would appear that he is no longer losing!

54 ... Qc5?!

Dozens of question marks have been attached to this time-trouble move, and Schlechter called it ‘the decisive mistake’, but, as we will see, it is hard in general to call it a mistake. Let us consider Black’s other possibilities:

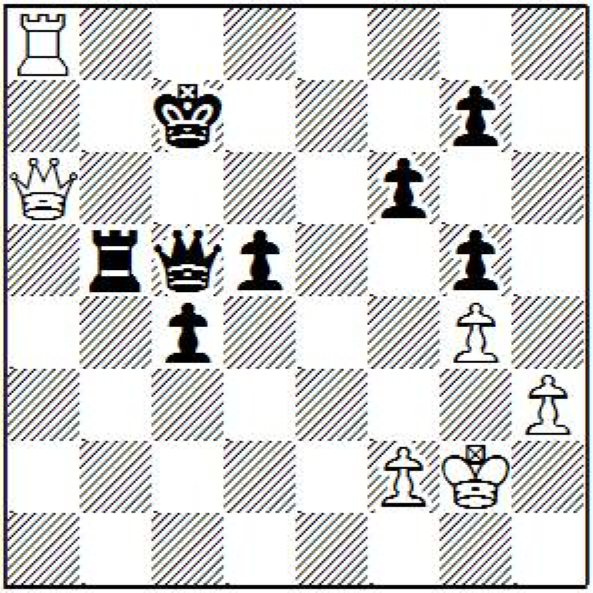
1) 54 ... Rb8 (after 54 ... c3 55 Re8! Ra5 56 Qe2 White is alright) 55 Qa7+! (Tarrasch suggested 55 Ra7+?! Rb7 56 Ra8, but after 56 ... Qb5! 57 Qa3 d4 58 Qe7+ Qd7 or 57 Qa1 Kd7 58 Qe1 Qc6 59 Qe8+ Kd6 60 Qf8+ Ke5 the king avoids the checks) 55 ... Rb7 (54 ... c3?! 55 Re8! Ra5 56 Qe2) 56 Qe3 Qd6 ‘with a win for Black’ – a variation by Lasker, contested by Schlechter with 57 Rg8 d4 58 Qe4 ‘with a strong attack for White’, but also suitable is 57 Qe1 Rb8 58 Ra7+ Rb7 59 Ra8 with a repetition. But after 56 ... c3! (instead of 56 ... Qd6?) 57 Re8 c2 58 Re7+ Kc6 59 Qe6+ Kc5 60 Qc8+ Kd4 61 Rxb7 Qc4! 62 Rc7 c1Q 63 Rxc4+ Qxc4 64 Qd7 Kc3 65 Qxg7 Qc6 Black does indeed have quite good winning chances.

My computer checked these subtleties for several hours, and as a result I came to the conclusion that the activity of White’s heavy pieces is sufficient to save the game, only instead of 56 Qe3? he should play 56

Qa6!, for example: 56 ... Qb6 57 Qa3 Qb4 58 Qa6 Qe1 59 Rg8 Qe4+ 60 Kh2 Qe5+ 61 Kg2 f5 62 Rf8, or 56 ... Qe1 57 Rg8! Qe4+ (57 ... Qe7 58 Qa5+ Kc6 59 Qa6+) 58 Kh2 Qe7, and here not 59 Qa5+?! Kd7! 60 Qxd5+? Qd6+, but 59 Qa8 or 59 Kg2!?

2) 54 ... Rb7 – Schlechter considered this to be the best chance, but after 55 Qa6! (not 55 Qe2? Qd6 56 Qe1 Qe5 57 Qa5+ Kd7 58 Rd8+ Ke6 winning) we reach that same, apparently drawn position as in the previous paragraph.

55 Qa6!



55 ... Rb8?

This is where the decisive mistake lies! ‘If 55 ... Rb7 there follows 56 Qe6! (with the pretty threat of Rc8 mate) 56 ... Rb8 57 Qf7+ Kc8 58 Qe8+ etc. Dr Lasker said that by 55 ... c3! 56 Rc8+ Kd7 57 Rxc5 Rxc5 at the cost of his queen he could still have gained a draw.’ (*Krefelder Zeitung*, 13 February 1910) This is perfectly true: 58 Qb7+ (58 Qa4+ Kc7 59 Qc2 d4) 58 ... Kd6 59 Qb6+ (or 59 Qxg7 c2 60 Qxf6+ Kd7) 59 ... Rc6 60 Qd8+ Ke6 61 Qg8+ Kd6 62 Qxg7 c2 63 Qxf6+ Kd7 64 Qg7+ Kc8.

It is not clear that Black would also have lost after 55 ... Qb6 56 Qc8+ Kd6 57 Ra6 Qxa6 58 Qxa6+ Kc5 (Capablanca), or 57 Qf8+ Ke5 58 Rb8!? (58 Qe8+ Kd6 59 Rd8+ Qxd8 60 Qxd8+ Kc6 61 Qe8+ Kb6 62 Qe6+ Ka5 63 Qf7 c3 64 Qxg7 Rc5) 58 ... Qb7 (58 ... Qxb8? 59 Qe7+ and Qe3 mate)

59 Qa3 Rb3 60 Qa1+ Kd6 61 Rxb7 Rxb7 62 Qa6+ Kc7 63 Qe6 Rb6 64 Qxd5 Rc6.

56 Ra7+ Kd8 (no longer sufficient was 56 ... Qxa7 57 Qxa7+ Rb7 58 Qc5+ etc.) **57 Rxg7 Qb6 58 Qa3 Kc8** (58 ... Qb4 59 Qa7!) **59 Qf8+ 1-0**

59 ... Qd8 60 Qc5+ and mate.

A highly interesting skirmish! This dramatic ending reminds me of the resumption of my game with Karpov (New York 8th matchgame 1990), where there also was a complicated queen and rook endgame, in which my opponent was a pawn up with winning prospects. But with an open king there are always some counter-chances, and after a sharp battle I managed to draw ...

Thus Schlechter took the lead: 3-2. The Berlin part of the match began. The next four games again ended in draws, Lasker switching with Black to the Sicilian Defence: after **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3** in the seventh game he tried **5 ... g6**, and in the ninth – **5 ... e5!?** which was extremely audacious for those times. The cautious Schlechter replied with the ‘hideous’, according to Tarrasch, **6 Nb3?!** (6 Ndb5!), allowing **6 ... Bb4! 7 Bd3 d5!** with a comfortable game for Black. After a complicated battle and mistakes by both sides an endgame was reached, in which the champion missed a seemingly certain win.

The score became 5-4 in the challenger’s favour, and the day of the last, decisive day arrived. All or nothing! A fantastic moment in chess history: for both players only a win would do! But it would be interesting to know what would have happened if they had nevertheless played a draw: would Lasker have still been acknowledged as world champion? Or would another match with Schlechter have been demanded?..

The press has retained for us a ‘photograph’ of the two players on the day of that game: ‘Lasker, with the pale face of a thinker, with his characteristic nose, and his small, seemingly closed eyes, which suddenly and unexpectedly open up on the chess board, all nervy, not capable of sitting still for an instant, constantly smoothing his combed-back hair with his hand. He thinks as though with his whole body, in which everything is constantly in motion – everything, apart from his face, on which a chess thought appears to have frozen ... On the other side is Schlechter, a small, at first sight inconspicuous man, with a high, broad forehead, a cigar clutched in his hand, economic and cold in every movement. His eyes are directed straight at the board, and it appears that his thoughts are occupied only with his move.'

Game 58

Em.Lasker-K.Schlechter

World Championship Match, Vienna/Berlin 1910, 10th game

Slav Defence D94

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3 g6!?

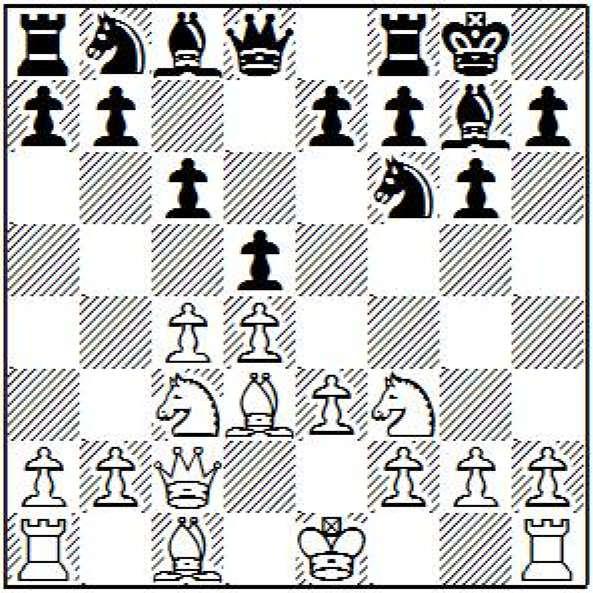
Avoiding 1 e4 for the first time in the match, Lasker encounters a surprise: an invention named after his opponent – the Schlechter Defence! At that time moves such as 4 ... g6 contradicted the generally-accepted opening norms. 'I did not want to play for a draw in the last game and I chose a little-known continuation, leading to interesting complications.' (Schlechter)

5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Bd3 0-0

Already at that time Schlechter had sounded out the idea of 6 ... Bg4, which for the moment, however, is slightly premature because of 7 Qb3.

7 Qc2?!

Lasker avoids 7 ... Bg4 at the cost of a tempo. More natural is 7 0-0 Bg4 (Smyslov's patent) 8 h3 Bxf3 9 Qxf3, and if 9 ... dxc4 (Smyslov used to prefer 9 ... e6, 9 ... Re8 or 9 ... Qd6) 10 Bxc4 Nbd7 11 Rd1 e5, then after 12 d5! (12 Bb3 Qe7 13 e4 exd4 14 Rxd4 Nc5 15 Bc2 Rfe8 16 Be3 Rad8 17 Re1 Rxd4 18 Bxd4 Nfd7 equalises, Kasparov-Hübner, Cologne rapidplay 1992) 12 ... e4!? 13 Nxe4 (13 Qf4!?) 13 ... Nxe4 (13 ... Ne5!?) 14 Qxe4 Nb6 15 Bb3 cxd5 16 Bxd5 Nxd5 17 Rxd5 Qb6 18 Qd3 White retains a small plus (Bareev-Kramnik, Novgorod 1994).



7 ... Na6

‘Very boldly played; 7 ... Nbd7 is more solid.’ (Schlechter) And ... much more passive! Closer to the truth is Euwe’s recommendation 7 ... dxc4 8 Bxc4 c5 9 dxc5 Nbd7. But in 1910 the idea of the Grünfeld Defence – to attack the white centre with the bishop on g7 – was not yet known, and the move 7 ... c5! seemed somehow improbable. But nowadays it is obvious: after 8 dxc5 Qa5 (8 ... Na6!? 9 cxd5 Nb4 10 Qd2 Nfxd5 11 Nxd5 Qxd5 12 Qxb4 Qxd3 is also good) 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Bd2 Nb4! or 9 0-0 dxc4 10 Bxc4 Qxc5 Black has easy equality

However, as one of the commentators aptly remarked, ‘in this game equal play did not interest either Lasker, or Schlechter.’

8 a3 dxc4?!

Here the line 8 ... Nc7 9 0-0 Be6 (Bernstein-Alekhine, Vilna 1912) is more solid, but the most energetic was again 8 ... c5!, e.g. 9 cxd5 cxd4 10 exd4 Nc7 or 9 0-0 Bg4 10 Ne5 Be6.

9 Bxc4 b5?

An irreparable weakening. In Euwe’s opinion, 9 ... Nc7 10 e4 (10 0-0 Be6) 10 ... Bg4 would have equalised, but from the perspective of the 21st century we know that in such positions – after, say, 11 Be3 – White’s chances are somewhat better.

10 Bd3 b4?!

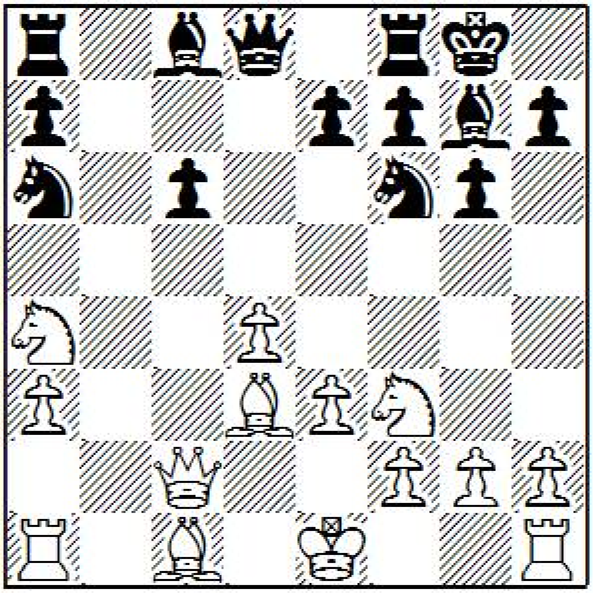
Another nervy, impulsive decision.

11 Na4

There is no point in taking the pawn – 11 Bxa6?! (11 axb4?! Nxb4 12 Qe2 a5!) 11 ... Bxa6 12 axb4 Qc8! 13 e4 Qg4 14 Rg1 Bb7 15 Be3 (15 ... c5? 16 h3), since now Black simply has a ‘dead’ knight at a6, a ‘hole-ridden’ queenside and a strategically lost position. The challenger’s opening experiment has been a failure, but, as we will soon see, that day this was of no significance.

11 ... bxa3 12 bxa3

Of course, not 12 Qxc6?! Nb4 13 Qxa8? Nxd3+ with a winning attack.



12 ... Bb7 13 Rb1

If 13 0-0!? Lasker did not like 13 ... Nd7 (with the idea of ... c6-c5), although here too after 14 Rb1 Qc8 15 e4 c5 16 d5 Black’s position is unenviable.

13 ... Qc7 14 Ne5

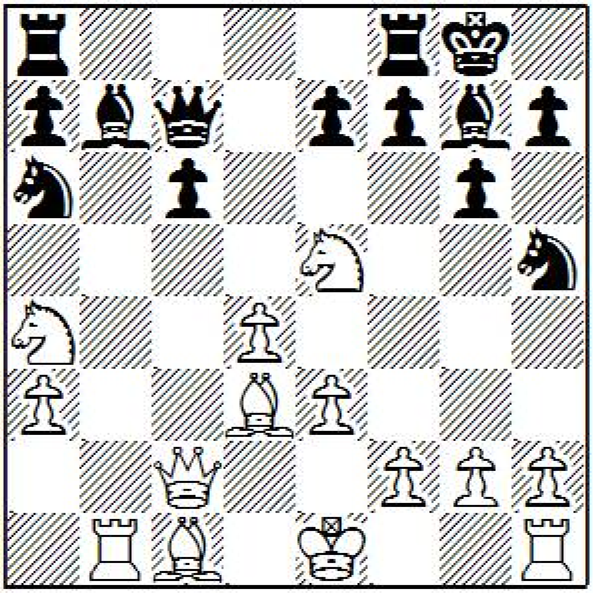
‘In his time Steinitz would have only needed roughly a dozen moves to blow up Black’s position. But Lasker begins deviating from calm and consistent development and nervously forces the attack, gradually allowing his opponent counter-chances.’ (Tarrasch)

It would appear that, having failed to win any of the previous nine games, Lasker had partly lost confidence in himself. In a normal situation

Black’s chronic weaknesses should have suggested to him the simple 14 0-0!? (Capablanca proposed the ‘bold’ 14 h4, but he himself would probably have castled) 14 ... Nd7 15 Qe2 Nab8 16 Bd2 with an overwhelming advantage.

14 ... Nh5

Of course, not 14 ... Nd7? 15 Rxb7 Qxb7 16 Bxa6 or 14 ... Rac8? 15 Bxa6 Bxa6 16 Nc5 Bb5 17 a4. But perhaps the best reaction to the knight sortie was 14 ... Nd5 15 0-0 Bxe5 (15 ... f6 16 Nf3 is hopeless) 16 dxe5 Nb6, although after 17 e6! Black has an unpleasant position all the same: 17 ... Nxa4 18 Qxa4 Nc5 19 exf7+ Rxf7 20 Qc2 Nxd3 21 Qxd3 followed by f2-f3 and e3-e4.



15 g4?

The seventh game of the match with Steinitz (*Game No.37*) involuntarily comes to mind. Lasker explained his anti-positional move as follows: ‘When so much depends on one game, the players become very excited and their imagination transforms into recklessness ... ’

Tarrasch wisely remarked that ‘in principle it is wrong to open up the kingside, giving the opponent compensation for his queenside defects,’ pointed out the harmlessness of the variation 15 Bxa6?! Bxa6 16 Qxc6 Bxe5 17 Qxa6 Bxh2 18 g3 (18 Bd2 Bd6 19 g4 Nf6 equalises) 18 ... Bxg3 19 Rxh5 gxh5 20 fxg3 Qxg3+, and recommended 15 f4 – after which

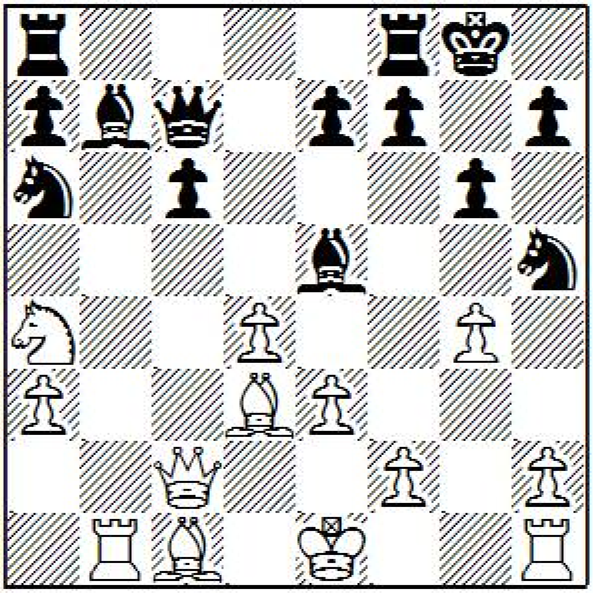
Lasker was afraid of 15 ... Bxe5 (but not 15 ... Rfb8? 16 Qc4 Bxe5 17 fxe5 c5 18 0-0 winning) 16 dxe5 Ng7 17 0-0 c5 ‘with equality’, although after 18 Qc4 Bc8 19 e4 Rd8 20 Be3 Black stands badly: his knight will not be able to move from a6.

The prosaic 15 0-0 was also possible, since 15 ... Bxe5 16 dxe5 Qxe5? fails to 17 Rxb7, while after 15 ... c5 16 Nxc5 Nxc5 17 Qxc5 Qxc5 18 dxc5 Bxg2 19 Kxg2 Bxe5 20 f4! Black has a difficult endgame (Zak).

15 ... Bxe5?

This justifies Lasker’s idea. It is surprising that no one pointed out the calm 15 ... Nf6! (Steinitz would surely have played this). The advance of the g-pawn has spoiled White’s position, and although after 16 0-0 Nd5 he retains some advantage, play is double-edged: 17 f4 Nb6 18 Bd2 c5 19 Nxc5 Rac8 etc.

Whereas up to this point the players have been groping their way through unfamiliar opening territory, there now begins the phase that gives the entire game particular value. Positional factors retreat into the background, giving way to calculation and intuition. There begins ‘play without rules’, in which both these outstanding players demonstrate exceptional flights of imagination.

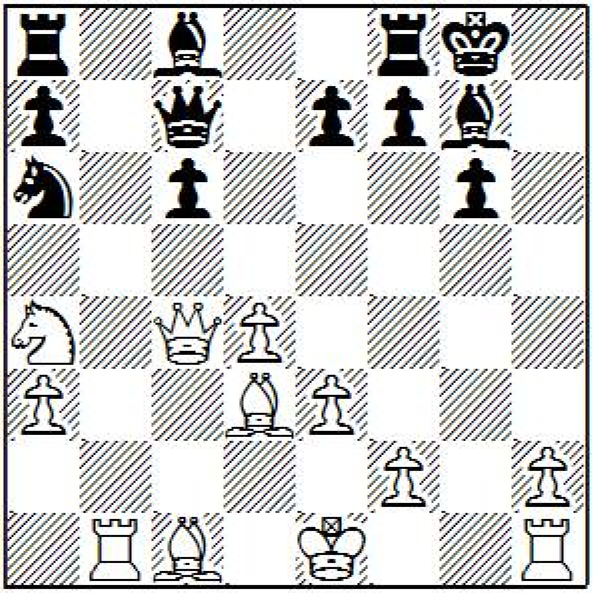


16 gxh5! (of course, not 16 dxe5 Ng7 and ... Ne6) **16 ... Bg7 17 hxg6 hxg6 18 Qc4!**

It was on this stroke that the world champion was counting, hoping to decide the game by tactical means: both Bxg6 and Rxb7 are threatened. If 18 h4?!, then 18 ... c5! 19 Rg1 Rac8 is good, while after Tarrasch’s recommendation of 18 f4 c5 19 Rg1 – 19 ... Rac8 20 Bxa6 Bxa6 21 Nxc5 Qd6 with unclear, double-edged play.

18 ... Bc8!

The only defence! 18 ... c5? is bad in view of 19 Rg1 Qxh2 20 Rxg6 Qh1+ 21 Kd2, and after 21 ... Qf3! (21 ... cxd4? 22 Rxg7+! Kxg7 23 Qxd4+ e5 24 Qg4+ Kh6 25 Rxb7 and 21 ... Nc7? 22 Rxg7+! Kxg7 23 d5 Qxd5 24 Qg4+ Kf6 25 Rxb7! are hopeless) both 22 Be2 Qh1 23 Rxg7+! Kxg7 24 d5 Qxd5+ 25 Qxd5 Bxd5 26 Bxa6 and 22 Rxb7 Qxb7 23 dxc5 Qf3 24 Rxa6 Qxf2+ 25 Be2 are decisive.



19 Rg1!?

A tempting move, creating the threat of Rxg6. ‘After 19 Bxg6 Be6 20 Bxf7+ Bxf7 21 Qxa6 Bd5 Black has a strong attack.’ (Schlechter) But, in my opinion, the variation 22 Rg1 Qxh2 23 Qf1! Rab8 (23 ... e5? 24 Rh1) 24 Rxb8 Rxb8 25 Nc3 Rb3 26 Kd2 refutes this evaluation, and better is 20 ... Rxf7! 21 Qxa6 Bd5 with counterplay: 22 Rg1 Qxh2 23 Qf1 Raf8 24 Rb2 (24 f4? Qc2) 24 ... e5 25 Nc3 exd4 26 exd4 Qc7 etc., 22 Rf1 Bg2! (22 ... Qxh2 23 Nb6 Rb8 24 Nxd5 – 24 Qxa7 Bc4! – 24 ... Rxb1 25 Qxc6 is unclear) 23 Qb7 (23 Rb7? Bxf1) 23 ... Qxb7 24 Rxb7 Bxf1 25 Kxf1 e5, or

22 Rb7! Qd6 23 Rf1 Bg2 24 f4 Bxf1 25 Qxf1, and White has had to give up the exchange for the initiative.

Meanwhile, he had two other excellent possibilities that did not involve giving up material:

1) 19 Bd2!? (a developing move suggested by Tarrasch) 19 ... Rb8 (19 ... Qd6 20 Be4) 20 Rxb8 Nxb8 21 Nc5, or 19 ... e5?! (recommended by Euwe) 20 Bxg6 exd4 21 Be4 dxe3 22 Bxe3 with an obvious advantage;

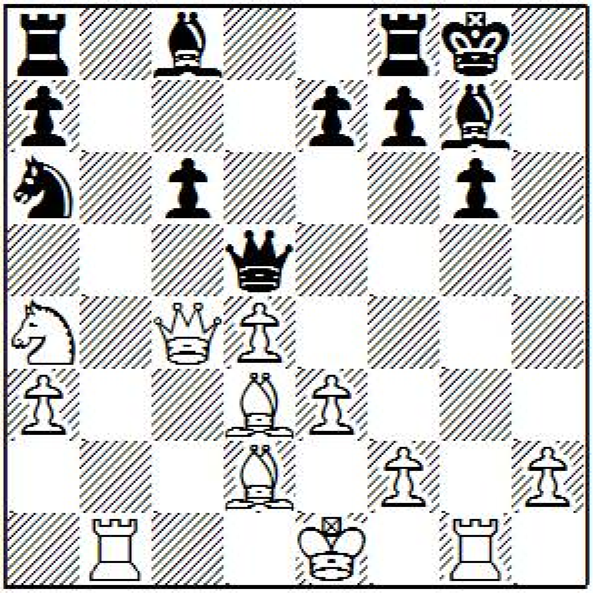
2) 19 h4! (a logical continuation of the assault) 19 ... Qa5+ (there is nothing better: 19 ... c5?! 20 dxc5) 20 Bd2 Qd5 21 Qxd5 cxd5 22 h5!, and Black is in difficulties, for example: 22 ... g5 23 Rg1 Bf6 24 e4!, 'winning a pawn with a continuing attack.' (Zak)

Lasker was apparently afraid of the exchange of queens, but there was no need to: on the contrary, with the queens on the board the position of the white king in the centre will always promise Black counterplay.

19 ... Qa5+

But not 19 ... Qxh2? 20 Rxg6 Qh1+ 21 Kd2 Qf3 22 Bb2! (threatening Rbg1) 22 ... Qxf2+ 23 Be2 and wins. However, a continuation not mentioned by the commentators was possible: 19 ... e6!? 20 Rg3 (or 20 f4 Rd8) 20 ... Rd8, and after 21 Bd2 White's advantage is rather less than in the game.

20 Bd2 Qd5



21 Rc1

In my view, after 21 Nc3!? (this is also not mentioned by anyone) 21 ... Qxc4 22 Bxc4 Kh8 23 Ne4 Black has a very unpleasant position: White has a wide choice of possibilities, including the advance of the h-pawn. But, as I have already said, Lasker was afraid of selling himself too cheaply, by exchanging the queens.

21 ... Bb7

Here 21 ... Qxc4?! 22 Rxc4 was now clearly bad.

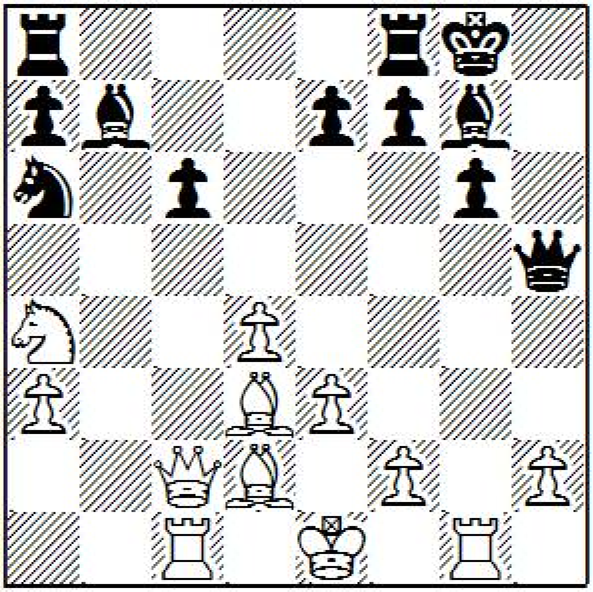
22 Qc2!?

Looking for complications! Euwe suggested the cold 22 Qxd5 cxd5 23 f4, and from the practical viewpoint he is right: with the knight on a6 White has an enduring advantage, and the plan with h2-h4-h5 remains in force. I think this is the way that Capablanca would have tried to handle the position.

However, for purely psychological reasons Lasker could no longer go in for the exchange of queens, since he had just avoided it in a more favourable situation.

22 ... Qh5

The queen attacks the h2-pawn and disturbs the white king. ‘The threat of 23 Rxg6 fxg6 24 Bc4 would have been more accurately parried by 22 ... Qd6.’ (Zak) A questionable assertion: after 23 Qb3! (23 Bxg6?! Qxh2 24 Rf1 fxg6, as in the game) Black has to play ... Qxh2 all the same, either immediately or after 23 ... Rab8 24 Rxg6.



But now a critical position has been reached: how is White to continue the offensive?

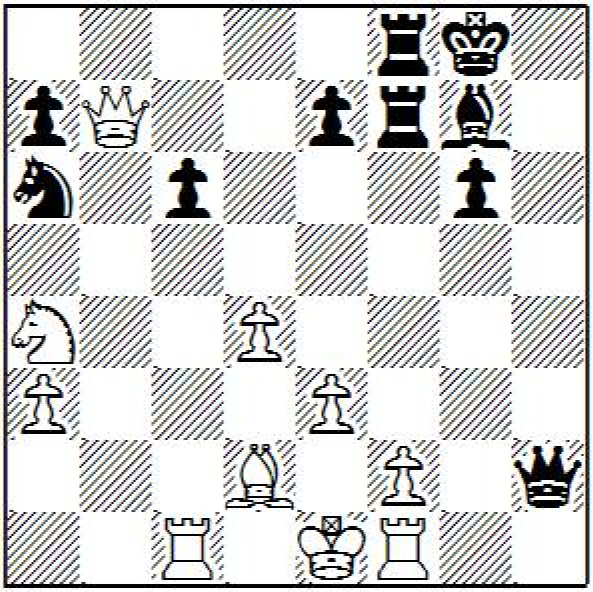
23 Bxg6?

Lasker underestimates Black’s counterplay along the opened f-file. Later he himself recommended 23 Rb1 Qxh2 24 Rf1 (24 Ke2 Qh5+ 25 Ke1 Qh2) 24 ... Qc7?! 25 Bxg6?! fxg6 26 Qb3+ Rf7 27 Qxb7 ‘and wins’, although after 27 ... Rb8! 28 Qxc7 Rxb1+ 29 Ke2 Rxf2+! 30 Rxf2 Nxc7 Black is perfectly alright. In my opinion, correct is 25 Bc4! e6 26 Qd3 Nb8 27 Nc5 Bc8 28 Rh1 with a powerful initiative, and therefore the best defence is 24 ... Bc8! 25 Qxc6 Rb8.

Zak suggested the ‘further strengthening of the position by 23 Bc4 e6 24 Qd3 Nc7 (24 ... Qxh2 25 Qf1!) 25 Nc5 Bc8 26 Ne4 etc.’ but after 26 ... Nd5 (or 26 Qe4 Nd5 27 Be2 Qh3) the situation is less favourable for White than the diagram position. And, apparently, best of all is Capablanca’s recommendation 23 Qb3! Rab8 24 Rxg6 Qxh2 25 Be4 – in my view White has strong pressure; the main thing is that Black is still suffering due to his ill-starred knight at a6.

In general it must once again be emphasised that without the queens White would have significantly fewer problems. As we will now see ...

23 ... Qxh2! 24 Rf1 fxg6 25 Qb3+ Rf7 26 Qxb7 Raf8!



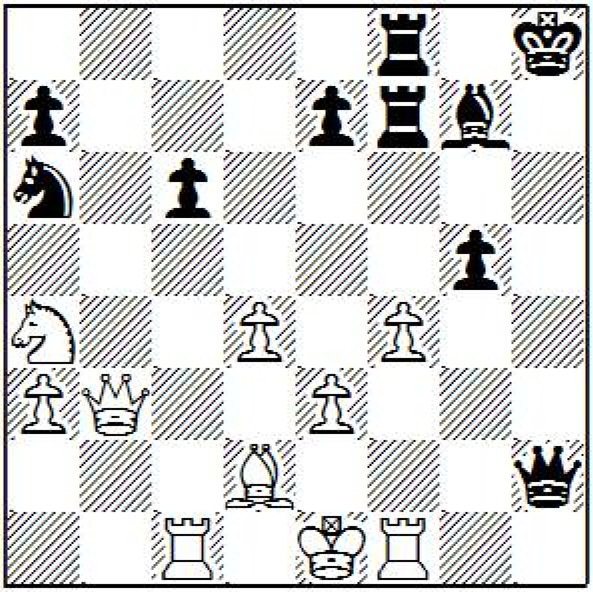
Schlechter takes heart! For the first time in a long while the position, from being openly bad for Black, has been transformed into one that is completely unclear: 27 Qxa6? fails to 27 ... Rxf2 28 Rxf2 Rxf2. This ‘knight gambit’ reminds me of a grandiose ‘Spanish’ from my return match with Karpov (London/Leningrad 16th matchgame 1986), where my opponent captured a knight on a3 and came under a mating attack.

With Schlechter it all turned out the other way round: by the irony of fate he lost all his pieces, apart from his wretched knight. How paradoxical: it is the knight offered as a sacrifice that remains alive! Apparently, as a punishment: it really is a very bad piece ...

27 Qb3

Lasker avoids 27 f4 not only because of 27 ... Nb8!? (but not 27 ... e5? 28 Qxa6 exf4 29 Qc4! fxe3?! 30 Bxe3 winning) with sharp play: 28 Qb3 (28 Qb4 g5!?) 28 ... Qg3+ 29 Kd1 (29 Ke2?! Bxd4 30 Rg1 Qh2+ 31 Kd3 Bg7 and ... Rd8 Euwe) 29 ... Bxd4 30 Kc2 Bg7 31 Nc5 Qh3 etc. It is simply that Black could have given perpetual check 27 ... Qh4+ 28 Rf2 Qh1+ 29 Ke2 Qh5+ 30 Kd3 Qf5+ 31 Ke2 Qh5+ 32 Ke1 (dangerous is 32 Rf3?! e5! 33 Qxc6 exf4 34 e4 Nc7) 32 ... Qh1+. I don’t know if Schlechter would have played this, but he did have a draw.

27 ... Kh8 28 f4 g5!?



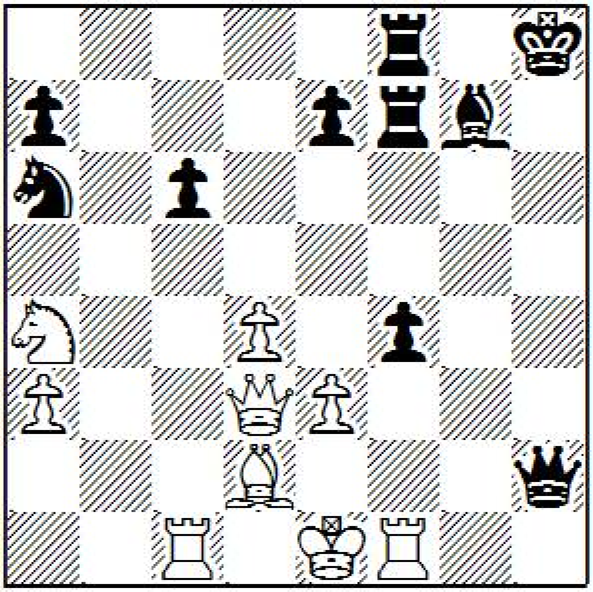
Dubious was 28 ... Qg3+?! 29 Kd1 Rxf4 30 Rxf4 Rxf4 31 Kc2! (Lasker). And indeed, the white king hides, whereas Black's comes under attack: 31 ... Rf2 32 Rh1+ Bh6 33 Qd3 Kg7 34 Rxh6! Kxh6 35 Qxa6 (if 35 ... Qxe3? the pin 36 Qd3 is decisive).

Much more interesting was the little-studied continuation 28 ... e5!? 29 dxe5 Qg3+ 30 Ke2 Rxf4 31 Rxf4 Rxf4 32 Rh1+ Rh4 33 Rxh4+ Qxh4 with sharp, unclear play. Apparently, after 34 e6 the most probable outcome is a draw; at any event Black's chances are not worse. I think that 28 ... e5 is at least as good as the move in the game.

29 Qd3

White's position is still quite good, as is shown by the variation 29 Rxc6!? Nb8 (some commentators give 29 ... gxf4? 30 Rxa6?? fxe3 31 Rxf7 Qxd2+ 32 Kf1 e2+, but 30 exf4! Nb8 31 Rc3 is the end for Black) 30 Rc7 (30 Re6 Qg3+ 31 Kd1 Rxf4) 30 ... Qg3+ (inferior is 30 ... gxf4? 31 exf4 Bxd4 32 Qd5 Qg3+ 33 Kd1 Bf6 34 Nc3 Rh7 35 Kc2) 31 Kd1 Rxf4 32 Rh1+ Rh4 33 Qb7 Rxh1+ 34 Qxh1+ Qh4 35 Qb7 Be5! 36 Rxe7! (36 Rc3 Bd6 37 Kc2 g4 is unclear) 36 ... Bd6 37 Re4 Qh1+ 38 Kc2 Bxa3 39 Nc3 or 39 Nc5 with the better prospects.

29 ... gxf4



30 exf4 (but not 30 Qxa6?? fxe3) **30 ... Qh4+**

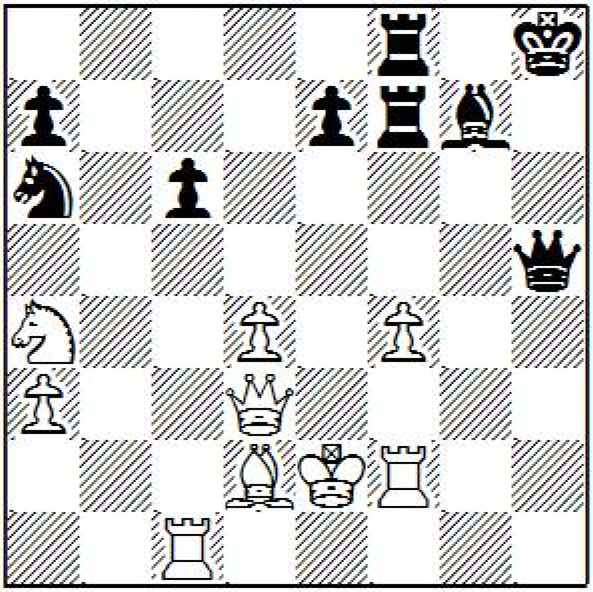
Perhaps the champion was hoping for 30 ... Nb8? 31 Nc5! Bh6 32 Ne6 Rg8 33 d5 with an obvious advantage: 33 ... Qh4+ (or 33 ... Rf6 34 Bc3 Qh4+ 35 Kd1 etc.) 34 Kd1 Qh5+ 35 Kc2 Qf5 36 Rh1 Rg6 37 Rb1 Nd7 38 Qxf5 Rxf5 39 dxc6 Rxe6 40 cxd7 Rf8 41 f5 Rc6+ 42 Bc3+ Kh7 43 Rbe1 and wins.

31 Ke2

Avoiding 31 Kd1 Qg4+ 32 Kc2 Qf5 with simplification and a draw: 33 Rh1+ Kg8 34 Rcg1 Qxd3+ 35 Kxd3 Rd8, or 33 Qxf5 Rxf5 34 Rce1 (34 Kd3?! Rd8) 34 ... Bxd4 35 Rxe7 R8f7. Lasker is eager to win!

31 ... Qh2+ 32 Rf2 Qh5+

Here (or a move earlier) the game was adjourned, and resumed the following day. It was one of the most dramatic adjournment sessions in the history of chess!



33 Rf3 (not 33 Ke3? Rxf4! 34 Rxf4 Bh6 35 Rcf1 Nc7! 36 Qe4 Rxf4 37 Rxf4 Nd5+ 38 Kf2 Qh2+ 39 Kf3? Bxf4 40 Bxf4 Qh1+) **33 ... Nc7!**

After 33 ... Nb8?! Lasker was planning 34 Rh1 Qxh1 35 Rh3+, although 34 Nc5 also promises an advantage. But with the knight on c7 the exchange 34 Rh1 Qxh1 35 Rh3+ is dubious on account of 35 ... Qxh3 36 Qxh3+ Kg8 37 Nc5 Nb5! 38 Ne6 Nxd4+ 39 Nxd4 Bxd4, when White is even slightly worse.

34 Rxc6?!

‘In this game one is amazed by Schlechter’s tireless boldness in attack and Lasker’s iron composure in defence.’ (B. Vainstein) ‘Incredible! Lasker is threatened with destruction from every side, and he grabs a pawn! This resembles a general who under a hail of bullets lights up a cigar.’ (Tarrasch)

Of course, it would have been more sensible to bring the knight into play – 34 Nc5, in order after 34 ... Nd5 to make the leap 35 Ne6 with very sharp play and, apparently, dynamic equilibrium. At any event, White would have been out of the danger zone, whereas now he is on the edge of the abyss, although computer analysis shows that, contrary to the opinion of many commentators, Black has no forced win.

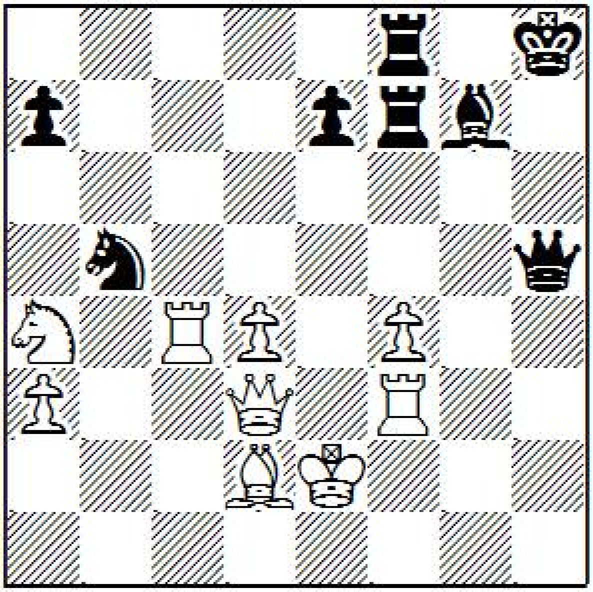
34 ... Nb5!

Schlechter considered 34 ... Nd5 to be ‘very strong and probably decisive’, but Lasker refuted this by 35 Qg6! (but not 35 Rc5? Rxf4! 36

Bxf4 Nxf4+ 37 Kd1 e5! 38 Qf1 Ng6 winning) 35 ... Qxg6 36 Rxg6 Nxf4+ (inferior is 36 ... Rxf4?! 37 Rh3+ Kg8 38 Rhg3! R8f7 39 Nc5 R4f6 40 Ne6 etc.) 37 Bxf4 Rxf4 38 Rh3+ Kg8 39 Rhg3 (39 Nc5 R8f6 40 Rg2 Rd6 41 Ke3 Rf7 is level) 39 ... R4f7 (*? – G. K.*) 40 Nc5 with advantage to White. I would like to refine this: 39 ... Re4+! gives an immediate draw: 40 Kd3 (40 Re3 is equal) 40 ... Rxd4+ 41 Ke3 Rxa4 42 Rxg7+ Kh8 43 Ke2.

35 Rc4!

An immediate catastrophe results from 35 Rc5? Nxd4+! 36 Qxd4 Qxf3+ or 35 Be3? Nxd4+! 36 Bxd4 Rxf4 37 Bxg7+ Kxg7 38 Qc3+ e5 39 Rc7+ Kh8.



35 ... Rxf4?

Some kind of black-out. ‘This combination is incorrect. I calculated the variation 36 Bxf4 Rxf4 37 Rc8+ Bf8 38 Kf2 Qh4+ 39 Kg2! (39 Ke2 Qh2+ 40 Ke3 Rxf3+ 41 Kxf3 Qh3+ and ... Qxc8) 39 ... Qg4+, noticing too late 40 Rg3! Qxc8 41 Qg6,’ writes Schlechter. ‘Decisive was 35 ... Rd8!, and if 36 Be3, then 36 ... e5.’ Indeed, after 37 Rc5 (37 d5 Nd6) 37 ... Nxd4+ 38 Bxd4 (38 Qxd4 Qxf3+) 38 ... Rxf4 39 Nc3 Rfxd4 40 Qe3 Rd3 White can resign.

Also unsuitable is 36 d5? (instead of 36 Be3?) 36 ... Rxd5 37 Rc8+ Rf8 38 Rxf8+ Bxf8 39 Bc3+ Bg7 40 Qc4 (or 40 Qe3 Bd4!) 40 ... Nxc3+ 41 Nxc3 Rc5 winning. However, after Minev’s brilliant discovery 36 Ke1!! it is now Black who has to find a way to save the game: 36 ... Qh1+ (36 ... Nxd4? 37 Rh3 wins) 37 Qf1 Qxf1+ 38 Kxf1 Nxd4 39 Rh3+ Kg8 40 Kg2 with a level position.

Years later Capablanca suggested 35 ... e5!? This leads to a crazy position, which does not lend itself to evaluation: 36 dxe5 Bxe5 37 Ke1 Bf6 38 Rc5 Qh1+ 39 Rf1 Qh4+ 40 Kd1 Nd4 41 Rd5 Qg4+ 42 Kc1 Ne2+ 43 Kb1. Here too there can be no question of a ‘decisive advantage’ for Black: all three results are possible.

From the purely practical viewpoint, probably more promising is Tarrasch’s recommendation of 35 ... Nd6!? 36 Rc5 Nf5, building up the pressure. For example: 37 Ke1 (but not 37 Be3? Qg4 – with the threat of ... Nh4 – 38 Kf2 Nxe3 39 Qxe3 Rxf4 and wins) 37 ... Qh4+ (37 ... Qh1+ 38 Rf1 Qg2 39 Qf3) 38 Kd1 Qg4 39 Kc1 Qg1+ 40 Rf1 Qxd4 41 Qxd4 Nxd4 with a somewhat better endgame, or 37 Kd1 Rd8 (Lasker judged this move to favour Black; 37 ... Qg4 38 Kc1! Qg1+ 39 Rf1 is equal) 38 Kc1!, and here I somehow failed to find any particular advantage for Black.

Thus, although Schlechter held an appreciable initiative, nowhere did he have a direct win. The play was double-edged, and Lasker did not intend to give up his crown ...

36 Bxf4 Rxf4 37 Rc8+ Bf8 38 Kf2!

Finally White can breathe more freely. A number of sources recommended 38 Rd8 e5! (38 ... e6 39 Qe3; 38 ... Qg4 39 Kf2) 39 dxe5 Qg4 40 Qe3! (but not 40 Kf2? Rxf3+ 41 Qxf3 Qh4+ 42 Ke2 Qxd8) 40 ... Nd4+ 41 Rxd4 Rxd4 42 Nc3 Bxa3 (42 ... Bc5!?) 43 e6 Be7 44 Kf1 ‘with advantage’. But in fact 44 ... Rb4! gives an easy draw: 45 Qe5+ Kh7 46 Rf7+ Kg8.

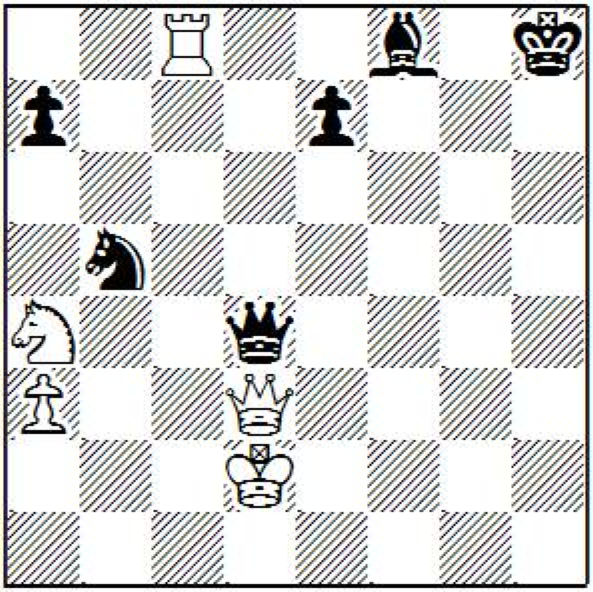
38 ... Qh2+ (Black avoids the variation referred to: 38 ... Qh4+ 39 Kg2! Qg4+ 40 Rg3! Qxc8 41 Qg6 and as yet he is by no means losing) **39 Ke1 Qh1+?**

Allowing the white king to escape successfully from the checks, whereas the move 39 ... Qh4+! would have guaranteed Black at least a draw:

1) 40 Kf1 (40 Rg3? Qh1+ 41 Kd2 Rf2+; 40 Kd1? Qh1+ 41 Ke2 Rxf3 42 Qxf3 Nxd4+) 40 ... Qh3+ 41 Kf2 Rxf3+ 42 Qxf3 Qxc8 43 Qh5+ Kg8 44 Qxb5 Qc2+, and White still has to make several accurate moves to achieve complete equality: 45 Kg3 Qg6+ 46 Kf3 Qf6+ 47 Ke4 Qh4+ 48 Kd3 Qh3+ 49 Kc2;

2) 40 Kd2 Qh2+ 41 Ke1 (dangerous is 41 Ke3? Rxf3+ 42 Kxf3 Qh3+ 43 Ke2 Qxc8 44 Qxb5 Qc2+ 45 Kf3 Qd1+ 46 Ke4 Qh1+!) 41 ... Qh4+ with perpetual check: after any attempt to run, the rook at c8 is lost.

40 Rf1 Qh4+ 41 Kd2 Rxf1 (41 ... Rxd4? 42 Rcxf8+ Kg7 43 R1f7+ and mate) **42 Qxf1 Qxd4+ 43 Qd3**



For the first time after the wild complications the advantage has passed to Lasker.

43 ... Qf2+

Hopeless is 43 ... Qxd3+ 44 Kxd3 Kg7 45 Nc5 or 43 ... Qf4+ 44 Qe3 Qxe3+?! (44 ... Qh2+ is more tenacious) 45 Kxe3 Kg8 46 Nc5 (46 ... Nxa3? is not possible due to 47 Ne6).

44 Kd1 Nd6

‘After 44 ... a6 there would have followed 45 Nb6, and if 44 ... Qg1+, then 45 Kc2 Nd4+ 46 Kb2 Qg2+ 47 Ka1 Qh1+ 48 Ka2 Qg2+ 49 Nb2 winning.’ (Lasker) White’s winning plan is to coordinate his forces, exchange queens, pick up the a-pawn and advance his own passed pawn to the queening square. It is hard to prevent this plan, especially since the champion carries it out with merciless consistency, whereas the challenger is clearly disheartened ...

45 Rc5 Bh6 46 Rd5 Kg8

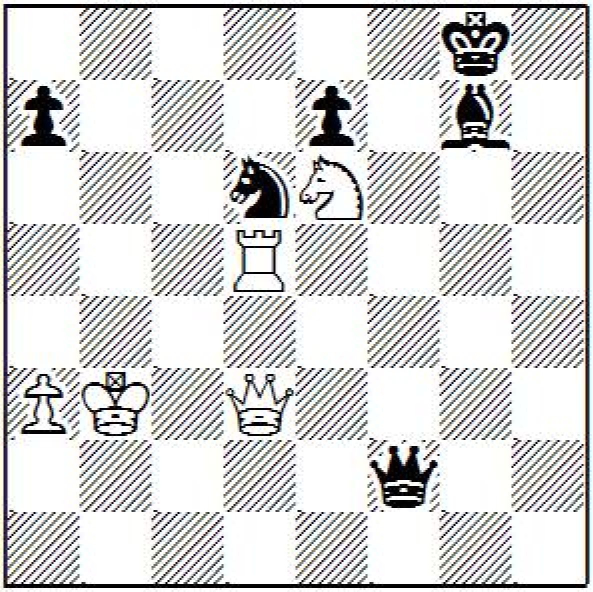
According to Schlechter, better drawing chances were offered by 46 ... Qa2, but I do not see any great point to this: 47 Rh5 Kg7 48 Nc5 Nf7 49 Rd5 etc. The move played is not at all bad: Black still has defensive possibilities, and whether the position is won for White is not so clear.

47 Nc5 Qg1+

Perhaps 47 ... Qg2 should have been played, although this would have been unlikely to make any fundamental difference after 48 Re5 Bg7 49 Re1.

48 Kc2 Qf2+ 49 Kb3 Bg7 50 Ne6?!

In my opinion, 50 Ka4 is more accurate.



50 ... Qb2+?

Another mistake that was not pointed out by anyone! 50 ... Qb6+! was essential, driving the king back to the kingside: 51 Kc2 Qb2+ 52 Kd1 Qa1+ 53 Ke2 Qb2+ 54 Kf3 (nothing is achieved by 54 Qd2 Qxa3 55 Nxg7 Kxg7 or 55 Rg5 Qa6+ 56 Ke1 Qa1+ with perpetual check) 54 ... Qf6+ 55 Nf4 Nf7. Of course, White will play for a win, but with such a king it is doubtful whether such a result can be achieved.

51 Ka4 Kf7?

The last serious error. The only chance was 51 ... Qg2 52 Nxg7 Kxg7 53 Qd4+ Kf7 54 Rc5 when according to Lasker ‘White wins’, but after 54 ... Qe2! (instead of the fatal 54 ... Qb7? 55 Qd5+ Qxd5 56 Rxd5 Ke6 57 Ra5 Nc8 58 Kb4 Kd6 59 Kc4) this still has to be demonstrated. White’s king is open, whereas the black knight, defended by a pawn, closely defends its monarch, and it is extremely hard to create a mating construction, for example: 55 Qd5+ Kf6 56 Rc3 Qa6+ 57 Kb3 Qb6+ 58 Ka2 Qf2+ 59 Kb1 Qf1+ 60 Rc1 Qf2 61 Qc5 Qe2, and if 62 Qxa7?, then the reply 62 ... Qb5+ 63 Ka2 Qe2+ equalises the position.

Generally speaking, I am not fully convinced that Lasker was definitely bound to win this ending. One thing is obvious: Schlechter, demoralised by his unfortunate sacrifice 35 ... Rxf4?, did not exploit all his defensive resources.

52 Nxg7

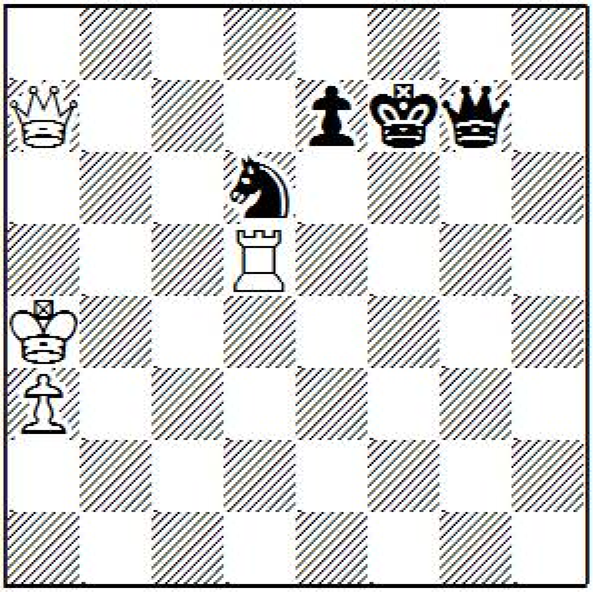
A more intricate plan was 52 Ng5+ Ke8 53 Qg6+ Kd7 54 Qf5+ Kc6 55 Qd3 Qa2 56 Ra5 Bd4 57 Nf3 etc.

52 ... Qxg7 (52 ... Kxg7 53 Rg5+ Kf8 54 Qf3+) **53 Qb3 Ke8**

Or 53 ... Kf6 54 Qb2+ Kf7 55 Qxg7+ Kxg7 56 Ra5 Nc8 57 Rc5 Nd6 58 Rc7 winning.

54 Qb8+ Kf7 55 Qxa7

With the fall of the a7-pawn Black’s position is now definitely lost, and he can merely prolong the resistance. Lasker proceeds towards his goal with confident manoeuvres of his heavy pieces.



55 ... Qg4+

If 55 ... Ne4, then, if there is nothing better, 56 Rf5+ Ke6 57 Rf3 Qg4 58 Qe3 Kd7 59 Qf4.

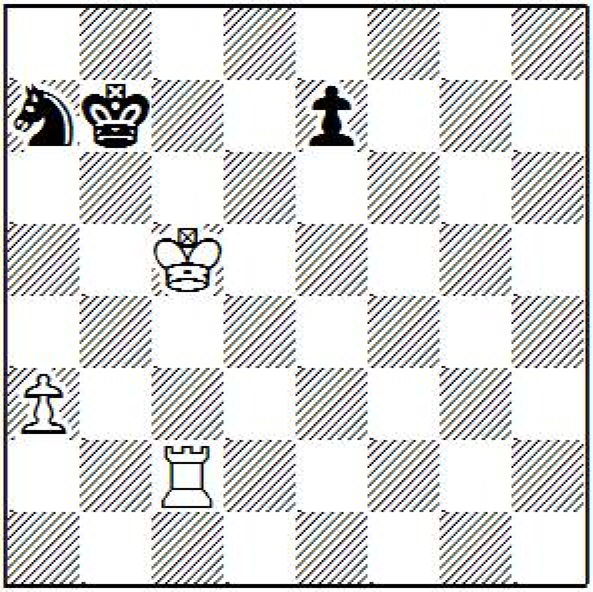
56 Qd4 Qd7+ 57 Kb3 Qb7+ 58 Ka2 Qc6 59 Qd3 Ke6 60 Rg5 Kd7 61 Re5 Qg2+ 62 Re2 Qg4 63 Rd2 Qa4?!

Slightly more tenacious was 63 ... Qh5 64 Qd5 Qh6 65 Qb7+ (65 Qf5+) 65 ... Ke8 66 Qc6+ Kd8 67 Rd3 etc.

64 Qf5+ Kc7?!

Capitulation, but also after 64 ... Kd8 65 Qe6! the exchange of queens would soon have been forced.

65 Qc2+ Qxc2+ 66 Rxc2+ Kb7 (or 66 ... Kd7 67 a4 Nb7 68 Ka3, then Kb4 and a4-a5-a6) **67 Re2 Nc8 68 Kb3 Kc6 69 Rc2+ Kb7 70 Kb4 Na7 71 Kc5 1-0**



‘He could have defended for a long time yet; a similar ending in one of the La Bourdonnais-McDonnell games ended in a draw. But nowadays the endgame is played incomparably better.’ (Tarrasch)

A titanic battle! Of course, there were many mistakes, but what an intense struggle, and with what inventiveness both sides played! The game was ahead of its time, and the commentaries on it, even later ones, often do not sustain criticism: so complicated and deep were the variations that occurred. Its study, beginning with Schlechter’s opening novelty, enables us to follow the development of chess thinking. Whereas nowadays independent play at the board normally begins from the 15th move at least, here it began much earlier, and the value of every move was extremely high. The two players immediately began playing creatively, and the tension was incredible – the game had colossal competitive importance, and therefore all the mistakes, in my view, are excusable.

An outstanding game – and an enormous achievement by Lasker, who managed to achieve a very difficult win. It has to be said that in his best years he always won the decisive games. The ability to accomplish such competitive feats is precisely what distinguishes champions ...

And so, this short, fierce duel ended in a draw: 5-5, and Lasker retained the title of world champion.

It can be imagined what an easy stroll the next match for the crown must have seemed to him – with the incorrigible optimist Janowski, whose peak form had long since passed (Berlin 1910). Nardus sacrificed 5,000 Francs, to see his favourite be mercilessly crushed: +8 =3.

The Great Akiba

In the meantime a new generation of followers of the Steinitz School had resolutely entered the chess arena. And the brightest of them, whose ideas are staggering deep even to this day, was from Poland, the 12th child in a poor teacher’s family, Akiba Rubinstein (1882-1961). For the purity and logicality of his style of play, this great chess artist was compared with an ancient sculptor, whose smooth and monumental work provokes admiration ...

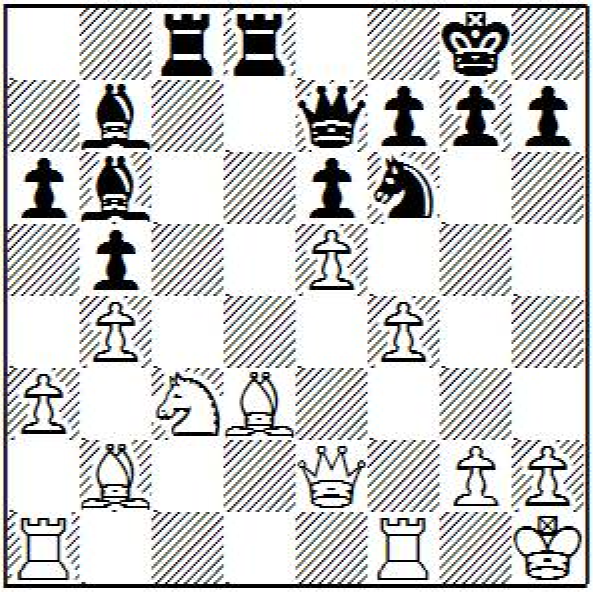
His first chess book was a modest manual by Sosnitz, written in Modern Hebrew (apart from which, Akiba was also fluent in Polish, Russian and German). He spent his youth in Lodz where there was quite a strong chess society headed by the master Georg Salwe, the first serious opponent of the talented young player.

Rubinstein became a recognised master after his third place in Ostend 1906 (behind Schlechter and Maróczy). He performed even more successfully the following year, winning the master tournament in Ostend 1907, then Carlsbad 1907 and, in his native Lodz, the Fifth All-Russian tournament. Here is virtually his most famous creation:

Game 59

G.Rotlewi-A.Rubinstein

Lodz 1907/08



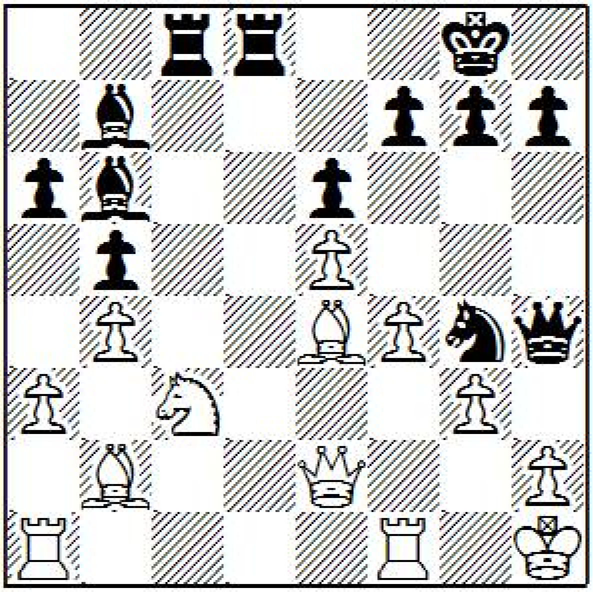
20 ... Ng4! (in playing 19 e5? Bb6+ 20 Kh1 White clearly underestimated this reply) **21 Be4**

It transpires that also bad are 21 Qxg4 Rxd3, and 21 Bxh7+ Kxh7 22 Qxg4 Rd2, and 21 Ne4 Rxd3! 22 Qxd3 Bxe4 23 Qxe4 Qh4 24 h3 Qg3 25 hxg4 Qh4 mate.

21 ... Qh4 22 g3

22 h3 loses to 22 ... Rxc3! 23 Bxc3 (23 Bxb7 Rxh3+ and mate; 23 Qxg4 Rxh3+! 24 Qxh3 Qxh3+ 25 gxh3 Bxe4+ 26 Kh2 Rd2+ 27 Kg3 Rg2+ 28 Kh4 Bd8+ 29 Kh5 Bg6 mate) 23 ... Bxe4 24 Qxg4 (24 Qxe4 Qg3 wins) 24 ... Qxg4 25 hxg4 Rd3! 26 Kh2 Rxc3.

But now Black exploits the fatal weakening of the h1-a8 diagonal.



22 ... Rxc3!!

‘One of the best combinations ever made. Black’s next, uncommonly spectacular move reveals the depth of Rubinstein’s combinative idea.’ (Romanovsky)

23 gxh4

The queen has to be taken, since no hopes are offered by either 23 Bxc3 Bxe4+ 24 Qxe4 Qxh2 mate, or 23 Bxb7 Rxg3 24 Rf3 (24 Bf3 Nxh2) 24 ... Rxf3 25 Bxf3 Nf2+ 26 Kg1 (26 Kg2 Qh3+ 27 Kg1 Ne4+ 28 Kh1 Ng3 mate) 26 ... Ne4+ 27 Kf1 Nd2+ 28 Kg2 Nxf3 29 Qxf3 (29 Kxf3 Qh5+) 29 ... Rd2+.

23 ... Rd2!!

‘Such moves bear the stamp of eternity! Black is a queen down, and nearly all his pieces are en prise,’ write Razuvaev and Murakhveri in their book *Akiba Rubinstein* (1980).

24 Qxd2

After 24 Qxg4 or 24 Bxc3 matters are concluded by 24 ... Bxe4+, while if 24 Bxb7 – 24 ... Rxe2 25 Bg2 Rh3!!

24 ... Bxe4+ 25 Qg2 Rh3!

In view of the unavoidable ... Rxh2 mate, White resigned. Rubinstein’s truly ‘immortal’ game!

Not without reason did Réti assert that Rubinstein created the most complete examples of chess art in the entire epoch after Steinitz:

‘The games of Steinitz himself, the creator of the theory, are by no means the best demonstration of its correctness. A whole generation of chess masters extracted from this theory everything in it that is of value for practical play. Rubinstein was the central figure of this generation, and his games are the most complete embodiment of Steinitz’s teaching.’

Game 60

A.Rubinstein-R.Teichmann

Match, Vienna 1908, 4th game

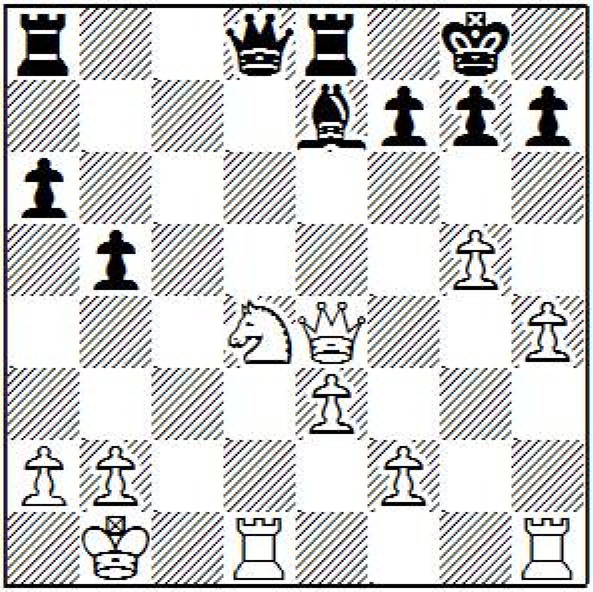
Queen’s Gambit D61

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Nbd7 5 e3 Be7 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Qc2!? (one of the first experiences with the formidable ‘Rubinstein Attack’) **7 ... b6**

7 ... c5! is more vigorous, as later occurred in the Lasker-Capablanca match (*Game No.90*).

8 cxd5 exd5 9 Bd3 Bb7 10 0-0-0

Alekhine against Yates (Hamburg 1910) preferred 10 h4!? (preventing 10 ... Ne4) 10 ... c5 11 0-0-0 cxd4 12 Nxd4 Re8 13 Kb1 a6 14 g4! b5 15 Bxf6! Nxf6 16 g5 Ne4 17 Nxe4 dxe4 18 Bxe4 Bxe4 19 Qxe4.



Here Yates took the bait with 19 ... Bxg5? and after 20 Ne6! Qe7 21 hxg5 h6 (21 ... g6 22 Rxh7! wins) 22 gxh6 Qxe6 23 Qd4 Qe4+ 24 Qxe4 Rxe4 25 hxg7 Kxg7 26 Rdg1+ Kf6 27 Rh6+ Ke7 28 Rc1 Ra7 29 Rcc6! he soon laid down his arms.

The most surprising thing is that, three years before this, the position in the diagram, but with the a8 rook at c8, occurred with reversed colours(!) in the game Duz-Khotimirsky-Rubinstein (Lodz 1907), and after (note that for convenience we will re-colour the pieces!) 19 ... Qb6 20 Qg4 Bf8 21 Rc1 it took a long time for Akiba to convert his extra pawn.

10 ... c5

10 ... Ne4!? needs testing. The game Rubinstein-Znosko-Borovsky (St Petersburg 1909) went 11 h4! f5 12 Kb1 c5!? (inferior is 12 ... h6 13 Bxe7 Qxe7 14 Nxe4 dxe4 15 Qxc7 Bd5 16 Bc4!) 13 dxc5 bxc5? (13 ... Ndxc5? 14 Nxd5!, but after 13 ... Rc8! 14 cxb6 Nxb6 15 Nd4 White’s advantage is not great) 14 Nxe4! (following the motifs of the well-known game Steinitz-Anderssen, Vienna 1873) 14 ... fxe4 15 Bxe4! dxe4 16 Qb3+ Kh8 17 Qxb7 exf3 18 Rxd7 Qe8 19 Rxe7 Qg6+ 20 Ka1 Rab8 21 Qe4 Qxe4 22 Rxe4 and White won.

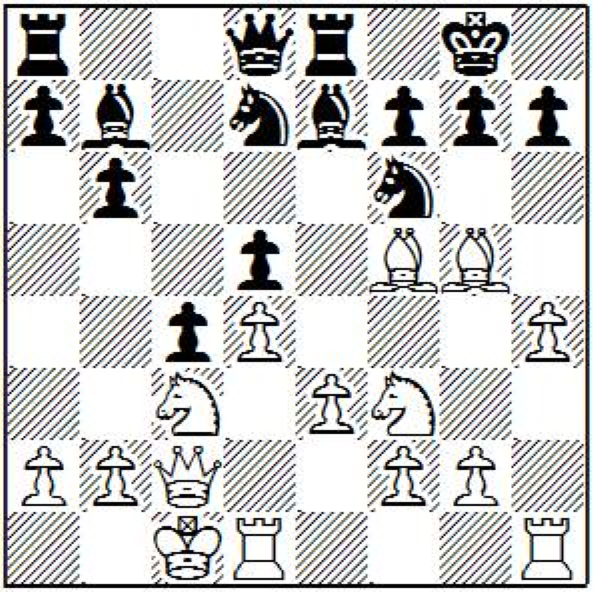
11 h4! c4?!

A dubious novelty. In Carlsbad (1907) Teichmann lost after 11 ... Rc8 12 Kb1 Re8 (as we have seen, Black fails to equalise after 12 ... cxd4 13

Nxd4) 13 dxc5! Rxc5?! (13 ... Nxc5? 14 Bf5 Ncd7 15 Bxf6) 14 Nd4 Ne4?! (14 ... a6!) 15 Bxe4 dxe4 16 Ndb5! Ba6 17 Qa4 Bxb5 18 Nxb5 Bxg5 19 hxg5 Re7 (19 ... Qxg5 20 Nd6 Re7 21 Qxa7) 20 Rd4 (I like 20 Nxa7!? Qc7 21 Nb5 Qc6 22 Rd6! Qxb5 23 Qa8+ Nf8 24 Rd8 winning) 20 ... Qa8 (or 20 ... Rxg5 21 Rhd1 Qe8 22 Nc7 b5 23 Qxa7) 21 b4! Rc8?! (21 ... Rxg5 22 Rc1!) 22 Nd6 b5?? (22 ... Rd8) 23 Nxc8! 1-0.

However, 13 ... bxc5! is clearly better. Here, in the opinion of grandmaster Razuvaev, ‘White has an interesting way to develop his initiative: 14 Bxf6! Nxf6 15 Ng5 h6 – if 15 ... g6 very strong is 16 Bb5 Rf8 17 h5 with an attack (*but in my opinion after 17 ... Qb6 the situation is unclear – G. K.)* 16 Bb5 (*16 Bc4 Bd6 – G. K.*) 16 ... Rf8, and now both 17 Bc4 and 17 e4 give White the advantage.’ Excuse me, but after 17 e4 the simple 17 ... g6! is alright, while if 17 Bc4!, then again 17 ... g6, and in the variation 18 Nge4 Nxe4 19 Nxd5 Nxf2 20 Qxf2 Kg7 21 Nf6 Bxf6 22 Rxd8 Rcxd8 Black has reasonable compensation for the queen.

12 Bf5 Re8 (with the intention of ... Nf8)



13 Bxf6! Nxf6 14 g4 Bd6 15 g5 Ne4 16 h5!

Rubinstein’s play, as always, is consistent and logical: in the given instance he is thinking only of attack! The following line was completely unclear and unnecessary for White: 16 Nxe4 dxe4 17 Nd2 c3! 18 Nxe4 cxb2+ 19 Kxb2 (19 Kb1 Ba3) 19 ... Bb4 20 f3 Qd5 21 Bxh7+ Kh8.

16 ... Qe7

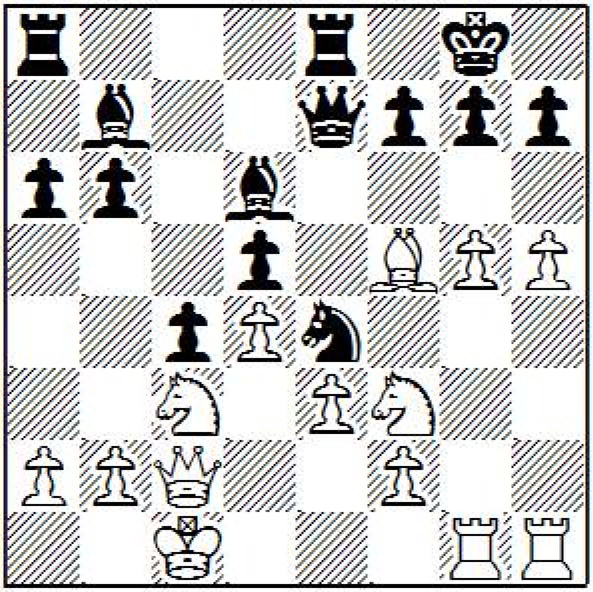
If 16 ... Nxg5?! 17 Nxg5 Qxg5 Tarrasch suggested 18 Bxh7+ Kf8 19 h6! gxh6 20 Rdg1.

17 Rdg1 a6?

Most probably the decisive mistake: the counterattack is too late. Essential was 17 ... g6 (but not 17 ... Nxf2?! 18 Qxf2 Qxe3+ 19 Qxe3 Rxe3 20 Rf1) 18 hxg6 hxg6. Now, according to analysis by Razuvaev, two dangerous continuations have to be considered:

1) 19 Bxe4 dxe4 20 Nd2 Rac8 21 Rh4 ‘and it is difficult for Black to defend’ – yes, difficult, but after 21 ... Kg7! still quite possible;

2) 19 Bxg6!? fxg6 20 Rh6 Kg7 (*? – G. K.*) 21 Nh4 ‘with a strong attack’ – in my view it is simply decisive: 21 ... Rh8 22 Nxg6 Qd7 23 Nxh8 Rxh8 24 f3! But after 20 ... Qg7! 21 Nh4 Re6 22 Nxe4 dxe4 23 Nf5! gxf5 24 Rxe6 Be7 25 Qxc4 Kf8 26 Qb5 White still has work to do.



18 Bxh7+!!

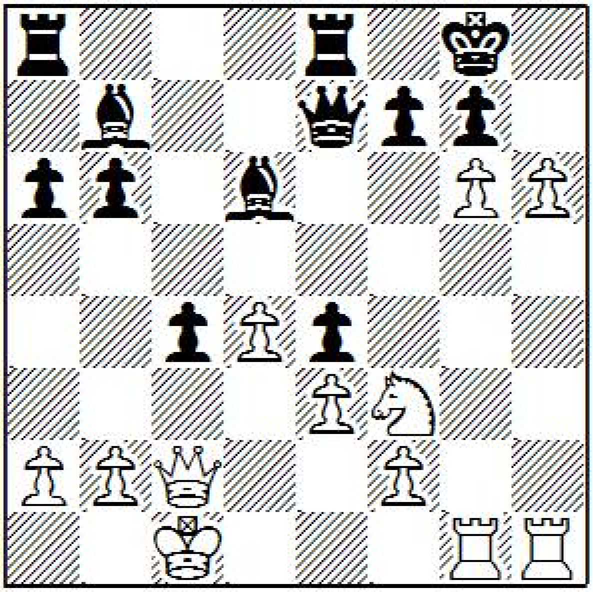
‘Like lightning from a clear sky! Such a combination cannot be calculated to the end, and this is the main difficulty in taking a decision in similar situations.’ (Razuvaev)

19 ... Kxh7 19 g6+ Kg8

If 19 ... fxg6? Tarrasch gives 20 Nxe4 dxe4 21 Ng5+ Kh6 (21 ... Kg8 22 Qxc4+) 22 hxg6+ Kxg6 23 Nxe4+ Kf7 24 Qxc4+, while I would add 22

Nf7+!, mating.

20 Nxe4 dxe4 21 h6!!



‘The crux of White’s attack! Black cannot prevent the opening of both the g- and h-files, after which the white rooks quickly decide matters. 22 gxf7+ and Rxg7+ is now threatened.’ (Euwe) This impressive picture is the culmination of the entire game.

21 ... f6

‘If 21 ... exf3 there would have followed 22 gxf7+ Qxf7 (22 ... Kxf7 23 Qg6+ Kg8 24 hxg7) 23 hxg7! with the double threat of Rh8 mate and Qh7 mate.’ (Euwe) 21 ... fxg6 is much more interesting, for example:

1) 22 Rxg6? exf3 23 Qxc4+ (even worse is 23 Rxg7+?! Qxg7 24 hxg7 Be4! 25 Qxc4+ Kxg7 26 Rg1+ Kf6) 23 ... Kh7! 24 Rxg7+ Kh8 25 Rxe7 Rxe7 with dangerous counterplay;

2) 22 h7+ Kf7 (22 ... Kh8? 23 Nh4 wins) 23 Nh4! (after 23 Ng5+ Kf6 the attack comes to a standstill) 23 ... g5 24 Nf5 Qf6 (or 24 ... Qe6 25 Rxg5 g6 26 Rh6!) 25 Rxg5 Qxg5 26 Nxd6+ Ke7 27 Nxe8 Rxe8 28 Qxc4! Kd6 29 Qg8 winning;

3) 22 Nh4!? was recommended by Razuvaev. The computer gives it the green light: 22 ... g5 23 Ng6 Qf6 24 h7+ Kf7 25 h8Q Rxh8 26 Nxh8+ Kf8 27 Rh5 and wins.

22 hxg7! exf3

‘22 ... Qe6 is not possible on account of 23 Rh8+ Kxg7 24 Rh7+ Kf8 25 Rxb7 exf3 26 g7+ Kg8 27 Qh7+ and mate in two moves.’ (Euwe) I should add that after 24 ... Kg8 White wins by both 25 Rxb7 exf3 26 Rh1 f5 27 g7 Be7 28 Rxb6! Qxb6 (28 ... Qf7 29 Rbh6) 29 Qxf5 and 25 Rgh1 f5 26 Ng5! Qd5 27 Rxb7 (or 27 Nf7!? Bf8 28 f4!! exf3 29 Qh2 f2 30 Rh8+ Kg7 31 Qh6+ Kf6 32 g7+ Ke7 33 g8N+ Kd7 34 Nf6+ Kc6 35 Rxf8 Re6 36 a4!? Rxf8 37 Ne5+) 27 ... Qxb7 28 Qe2! Qd5 (or 28 ... Qc7 29 Rh7) 29 Qh5 Kg7 30 Qh6+ Kf6 31 Nh7+ Ke7 32 Qg7+ Kd8 33 Nf6 Bf8 34 Rh8 Qd6 35 Qf7 Qe7 36 Qxe8+ Qxe8 37 Nxe8 Kxe8 38 g7.

23 Rh8+ Kxg7 24 Rh7+ Kg8 25 Qf5!

The concluding blow: White has a mass of threats, beginning with Qh5.

25 ... c3 (desperation) **26 Rxe7 1-0**

An enormous impression on the chess world was made by Rubinstein’s performance at the Chigorin Memorial, the strong international tournament in St Petersburg (1909). He started with 4 out of 4, and among those defeated – and in what style! – was the world champion himself.

Game 61

A.Rubinstein-Em.Lasker

St Petersburg 1909, 3rd round

Queen’s Gambit D32

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 c4 e6 4 Bg5!?

After 4 Nc3 Lasker used to play both 4 ... Be7 and 4 ... c5 (*Game Nos. 41, 42*). ‘Rubinstein, who had made a special study of the Queen’s Gambit and was convinced that the “orthodox” defence was unsatisfactory, very cleverly led the game to a position similar to this defence.’ (Tarrasch)

4 ... c5?!

The champion avoids the Rubinstein attack – 4 ... Be7 5 Nc3 Nbd7 6 e3 0-0 7 Qc2, with which in the first round his opponent had crushed Znosko-Borovsky, and a year earlier Teichmann (*Game No.60*). But now Black reaches not the most favourable position with an ‘isolani’.

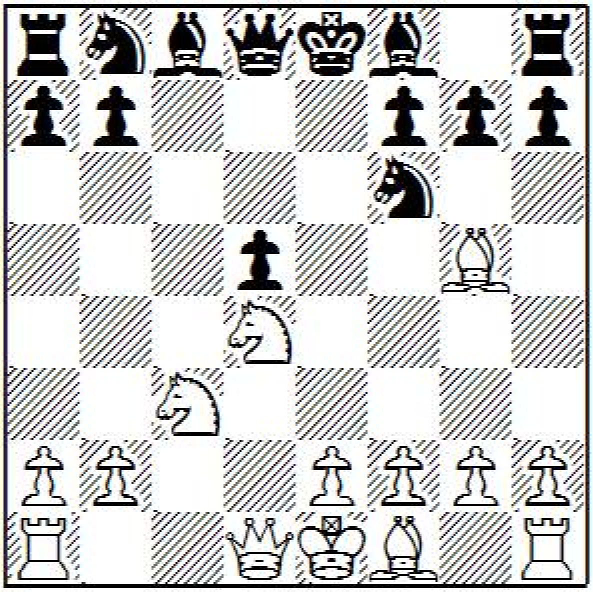
5 cxd5 exd5 6 Nc3 cxd4

Avoiding getting involved in the discussion which a year earlier flared up in Marshall’s games with Salwe and Rubinstein in the variation 6 ... Be7 7 dxc5! Be6.

After the simultaneous-like move 6 ... c4?! White has both 7 Bxf6! and 7 e4!? If 6 ... Nc6 Black again has to reckon with 7 Bxf6. Finally, after 6 ... Be6, which occurred between McDonnell and La Bourdonnais back in London 1834, Lasker himself was successful with 7 e3, or even, as later also played by Alekhine, 7 e4!?

7 Nxd4

Lilienthal’s idea 7 Bxf6!? gxf6 8 Qxd4 Be6 9 e4 Nc6 10 Bb5 dxe4 11 Qxe4 is interesting. True, here White has to reckon with the sharp 7 ... Qxf6 8 Nxd5 Qd8 9 Qxd4 Nc6 and 10 ... Be6, in the spirit of the Schara-Hennig Gambit. The luring of the opponents into similar, often dubious but ‘chancy’ positions was a typical Lasker trait!



7 ... Nc6?!

‘An inaccuracy that leads to difficulties. Correct is 7 ... Be7 8 e3 0-0, when Black has no weak points.’ (Lasker) But, as is shown by the experience of the 20th century, after 9 Be2 or 9 Bd3 he still has to fight for equality.

8 e3

Here if 8 e4 there is the good reply 8 ... Bc5! 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 exd5 0-0! According to Tarrasch, dangerous is 8 Bxf6!? Qxf6 9 Ndb5 (not 9 Nxd5?? Qxd4) 9 ... Bb4 ‘with advantage to Black’, but after 10 Nc7+ Kf8 11 Nxd5 White is simply a pawn up. As, however, he also is after 9 ... Qe5 10 Nxd5 Bb4+ 11 Nxb4 Qxb5 12 Nxc6 Qxc6 13 Rc1 Qb6 14 Qa4+ Bd7 15 Qa3!

8 ... Be7 (in the event of 8 ... Bb4 9 Rc1 or 9 Bb5 the pin on the f6 knight is unpleasant) **9 Bb5! Bd7 10 Bxf6**

‘The pawn is won only temporarily. 10 0-0 was more solid, after which the d-pawn would all the same have been bound to fall.’ (Lasker)

10 ... Bxf6 11 Nxd5 Bxd4

11 ... Be5?! does not give compensation for the pawn after the reply 12 0-0 0-0 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Nc3 Re8 15 Qd2 Qc7 16 Nf3 Bf6 17 Rac1 etc.

12 exd4

12 ... Qg5! (the only way of creating definite counterplay) **13 Bxc6**

Of course, not 13 Nc7+? Kd8 14 Nxa8 Qxb5.

13 ... Bxc6 14 Ne3

Less is promised by 14 Qe2+ (14 Nc7+? Kd7 15 Nxa8 Re8+) 14 ... Kd7 15 Ne3 Bxg2 16 Rg1 Qa5+ 17 Qd2 Qxd2+ 18 Kxd2 Be4 with equality (if 19 Rxg7, then 19 ... Bg6).

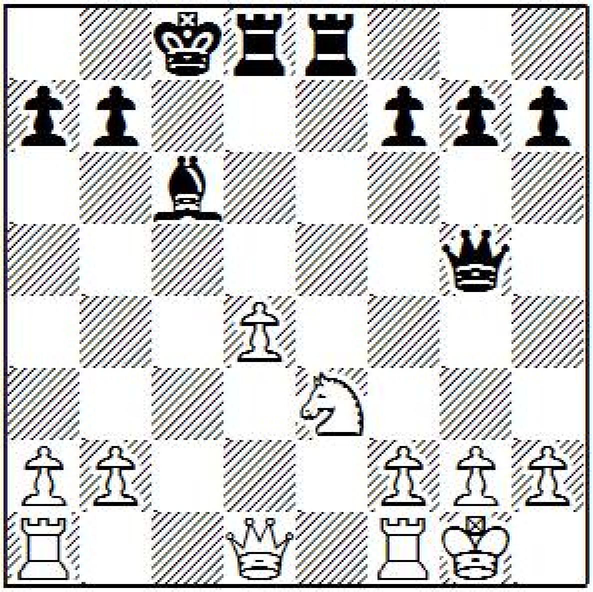
14 ... 0-0-0?!

Later Lasker suggested 14 ... Bxg2 15 Rg1 (but not 15 Nxg2? Qxg2 16 Qe2+ Kd8 17 0-0-0 Qg6 with an excellent game: 18 Qd3 Rc8+ 19 Kb1 Re8 etc.) 15 ... Qa5+ 16 Qd2 Qxd2+ 17 Kxd2 Be4, but Bernstein showed that by 18 Rg4! (18 Rxg7? Bg6) 18 ... Bg6 19 f4 White retains some advantage (for my part, I should like to add 19 ... Rd8 20 f5 Bh5 21 Rh4 Bf3 22 Rg1).

More interesting is Razuvaev’s recommendation 14 ... 0-0! 15 0-0 Rad8 with quite good compensation for the pawn.

15 0-0 Rhe8

With the obvious threat of ... Rxe3.



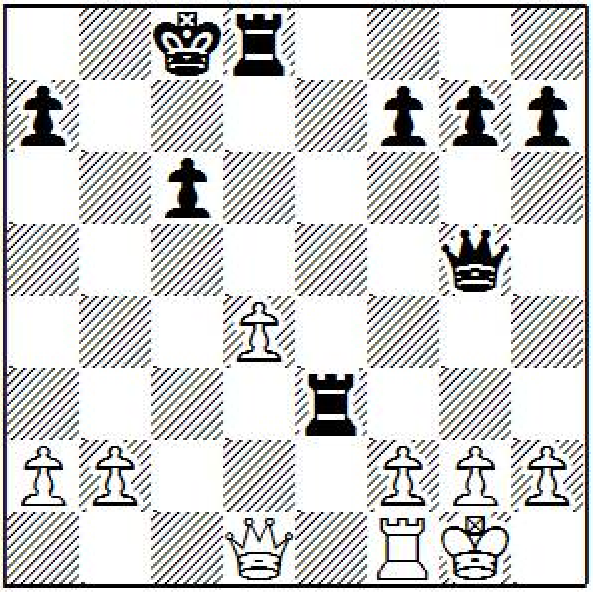
16 Rc1!!

I agree with Lasker: unusually subtle! The threat is Rc5 and d4-d5.

16 ... Rxe3

‘Also after 16 ... Kb8 17 Rc5 (*passive is 17 Qd2 Re4! 18 Rcd1, but not 18 d5? Rxd5 – G. K.*) 17 ... Qf4 18 d5 Rxe3 19 Qc1! Re4 20 dxc6 bxc6 21 Qc3 Black would have stood badly.’ (Lasker) But it seems to me that better is 17 ... Qxc5! 18 dxc5 Rxd1 19 Rxd1 a5 with hopes of saving the endgame.

17 Rxc6+ bxc6



18 Qc1!!

‘This is the crux of the matter! Black had evidently reckoned only on 18 fxe3? Qxe3+ 19 Kh1 Rxd4, which is advantageous for him.’ (Tarrasch) It is amusing that Rubinstein also defeated Capablanca with the help of the same queen move (*Game No.64*).

18 ... Rxd4

According to Lasker, more tenacious was 18 ... Re5 19 Qxc6+ (not 19 f4?! Rc5!) 19 ... Kb8 20 dxe5 (not 20 f4?! Re6) 20 ... Qxe5. Razuvaev, after adding 21 Rc1, writes that ‘White still has to overcome considerable technical difficulties.’ Even so, from the standpoint of modern chess, his position is objectively won! And even in the obviously secondary variation 20 f4? Re6 21 Qxe6 Qxg2+ 22 Kxg2 fxe6, where, according to Razuvaev, ‘Black has good drawing chances’, after 23 Rd1 it is not to easy to make a draw.

19 fxe3 Rd7 (19 ... Rd6 20 Rxf7 etc.) **20 Qxc6+ Kd8**

If now White delays, his extra pawn will not play any role: after all, his king is also exposed.

21 Rf4!!

‘A wonderful idea. White threatens to decide the game by a direct attack on the king – 22 Qa8+ and Re4+ or Rc4+. To avoid this Black is forced to allow the exchange of queens and a lost endgame.’ (Lasker)

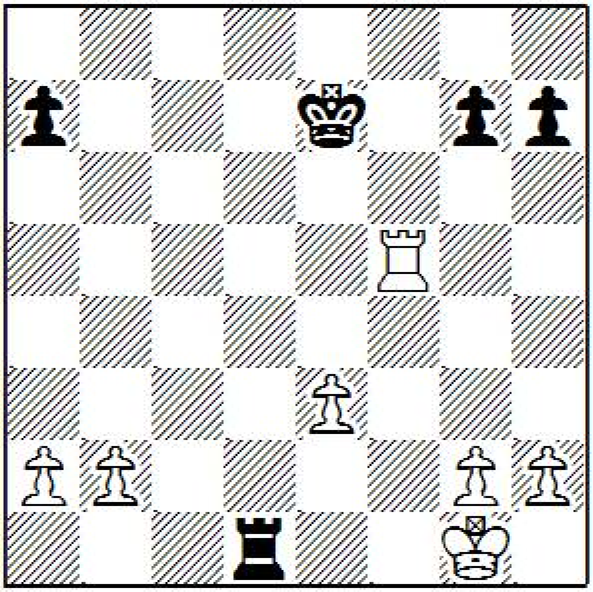
21 ... f5

‘If 21 ... Qa5, then 22 Qa8+ Ke7 (22 ... Kc7 23 Rc4+) 23 Re4+! Kf6 24 Qc6+ Kg5 25 h4+.’ (Lasker) After 21 ... Rd1+ Tarrasch gave 22 Kf2 Rd2+ 23 Ke1 Qxg2 24 Rd4+ Ke7 25 Qd6+ and mate; I should like to add 23 ... Qa5 24 Ra4 Rd6+ 25 Rxa5 Rxc6 26 Rxa7 winning. But instead of 22 ... Rd2+?, in my opinion, better is 22 ... Qa5! 23 Qa8+ Ke7 24 Rxf7+ Kxf7 25 Qf3+ Ke8 26 Qxd1 Qxa2 27 Qh5+ with advantage to White, but Black avoids an immediate rout.

22 Qc5! (threatening Qf8+) **22 ... Qe7**

The only defence: if 22 ... Rd1+ (22 ... Qf6 23 Rd4) 23 Kf2 Rd2+ 24 Ke1 Qxg2 there follows 25 Qa5+ and Qxd2.

23 Qxe7+ Kxe7 (or 23 ... Rxe7 24 Rxf5 Rxe3 25 Rf7 winning) **24 Rxf5 Rd1+**



25 Kf2!

After 25 Rf1?! Rd2 26 Rb1 Re2 Black would have retained drawing chances (Kmoch).

25 ... Rd2+ 26 Kf3 Rxb2 27 Ra5! Rb7 28 Ra6!

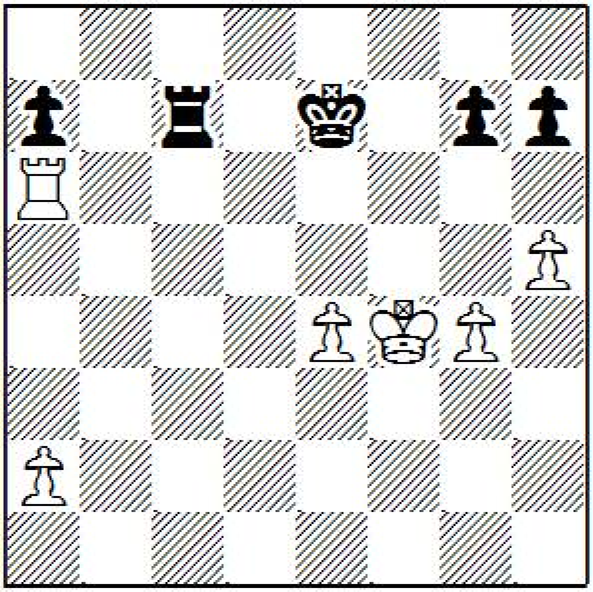
An ideal place for the rook! White creates a textbook rook endgame, one of those wonderful endings that gave birth to Tartakower’s well-known aphorism: ‘Rubinstein is the rook ending of a chess game, begun by the gods a thousand years ago.’

28 ... Kf8 29 e4 Rc7 30 h4!

‘Not only a preparation for further activity, but also prophylaxis against ... Rc2.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)

30 ... Kf7 31 g4 Kf8 32 Kf4 Ke7 33 h5!

With the obvious intention of opening a way for the king.



33 ... h6

Creating an opening via g6. If 33 ... Rb7, then 34 g5 Rc7 35 e5 Rb7 36 Kf5 Rc7 37 g6! h6 38 a4 Rb7 39 Re6+! Kd7 (39 ... Kf8 40 Rc6 Ke7 41 Rc8 and Rg8) 40 Rf6! Ke8 41 Rf7! Rxf7+ 42 gxf7+ Kxf7 43 e6+ Ke7 44 Ke5 wins (Lasker).

The result is roughly the same after 33 ... Kd8 34 e5 Ke8 35 g5 Rc4+ 36 Kf5 Rc7 37 g6 h6 38 Re6+! or 33 ... Kf7 34 Kf5 (also possible is 34 h6 gxh6 35 Rxh6 Kg7 36 Ra6 Kf7 37 Kf5 Re7 38 e5 Rb7 39 Rc6 followed by a4-a5-a6 winning) 34 ... Ke7 35 g5 Kf7 36 e5 Ke7 37 g6 h6 38 Re6+! Kf8

(38 ... Kd7 39 Rf6! Ke8 40 Rf7 etc.) 39 Rd6 Ke7 40 Ra6 Kd7 (40 ... Rb7 41 Rc6 Rd7 42 Rc8 and Rg8) 41 Rf6! (Lisitsyn).

34 Kf5 Kf7 35 e5 Rb7 36 Rd6 Ke7

Equally hopeless are both 36 ... Rc7 37 Rd7+! Rxd7 38 e6+ Ke7 39 exd7 Kxd7 40 Kg6 and, as we will see, 36 ... Kf8.

37 Ra6

The last move before the time control (which was 2½ hours for 37 moves, 1½ hours for the next 23 moves, and then one hour for 15 every moves). White is not in a hurry to go in for the forcing variation 37 Kg6 Rb4 (37 ... Rb5 38 Ra6; 37 ... Kf8 38 Rd8+ Ke7 39 Rg8 winning) 38 Kxg7 Rxg4+ 39 Kxh6 Re4 40 Ra6 Rxe5 41 Kg6 and wins.

37 ... Kf7 38 Rd6 Kf8 39 Rc6!?

Lasker also considered 39 Rd8+ Kf7 (if 39 ... Ke7 White wins by both 40 Ra8 Kf7 41 a4 and 40 Rg8 Kf7 41 Rc8 Ke7 42 a4 Rd7 43 Rg8 Kf7 44 e6+!) 40 e6+ Ke7 41 Rd7+! (but not 41 Rg8? Rb5+ 42 Kg6 Rg5+ 43 Kh7 Rxg4 44 Rxg7+ Rxg7+ 45 Kxg7 Kxe6 46 Kxh6 Kf6 with a draw).

39 ... Kf7 40 a3! 1-0

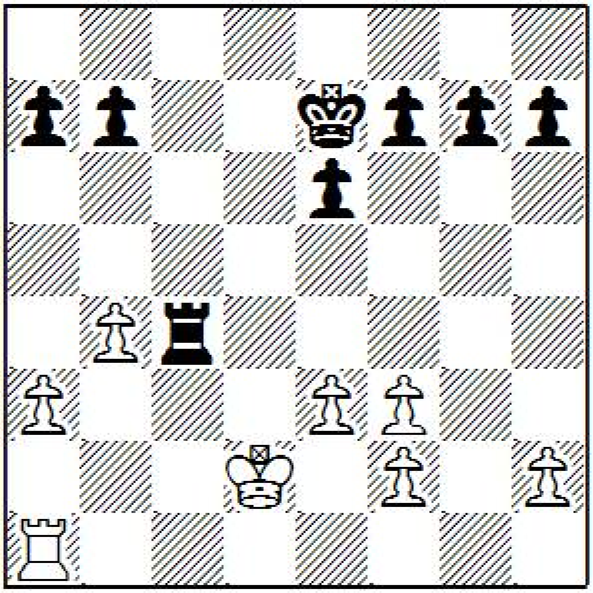
Taking away a square from the rook. Black is in zugzwang: 40 ... Re7 41 e6+ Kg8 42 Kg6 Re8 43 e7! Kh8 44 Rd6 and Rd8; 40 ... Kf8 41 Kg6 Rb3 42 Rc8+ Ke7 43 Rc7+ Ke6 44 Rxg7; 40 ... Ke7 41 Kg6 Kd7 (41 ... Kf8 42 Rc8+) 42 Rd6+ Ke8 43 Kh7 Kf8 44 Rd8+ Kf7 45 Rg8 and Rxg7.

An historic game, without question. But let’s see what the ‘great Akiba’ accomplished later. In the ninth round, with 7 points out of 8, he unexpectedly lost to the Russian master Duz-Khotimirsky (who in the 16th round also defeated Lasker!) and ... as if nothing had happened he immediately began a new spurt.

Game 62

E.Cohn-A.Rubinstein

St Petersburg 1909, 10th round



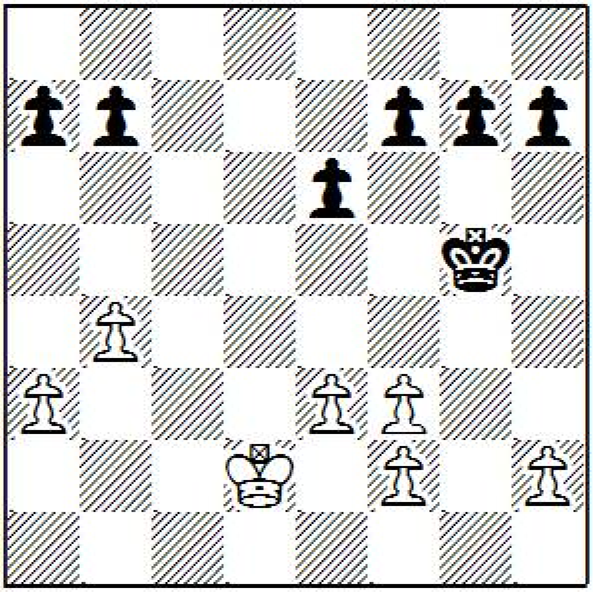
24 Rc1?

Of course, White should have played 24 f4 (preventing ... Rh4) 24 ... b5 25 Kd3 with good drawing chances. ‘Cohn, however, assumed that the pawn ending was the simplest way of securing this result.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)

24 ... Rxc1 25 Kxc1 Kf6!

‘Rubinstein, an outstanding master of the endgame, begins an attack on the h2-pawn, which proves decisive.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov) ‘An attack with insignificant means, but splendidly conducted.’ (Lasker)

26 Kd2 Kg5



27 Ke2

‘The counterattack on the queenside is too slow: after 27 Kd3 Kh4 28 Kc4 Kh3 Black has time to pick up the h2-pawn and queen his own h-pawn. Here it is important only that in reply to Kc7 he should play ... b7-b5.’ (Averbakh, Maizelis)

27 ... Kh4 28 Kf1 Kh3 29 Kg1

‘The white king is tied to the defence of the h-pawn. He is powerless against the impending black pawn offensive on the kingside.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)

29 ... e5! 30 Kh1

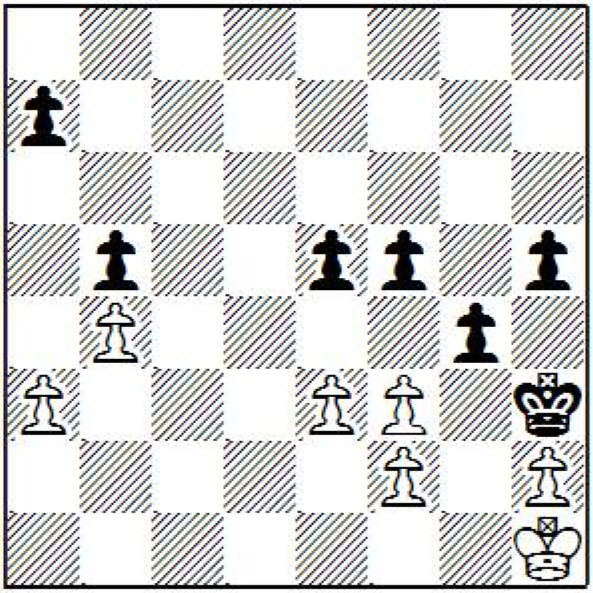
Also bad is 30 f4? exf4 31 exf4 Kg4 or 30 e4 g5 31 Kh1 h5 32 Kg1 h4 33 Kh1 g4 34 fxg4 Kxg4 35 Kg2 h3+ 36 Kf1 Kf3. But, in the opinion of Averbakh and Maizelis, 30 a4! b6 31 b5 was more tenacious, when Black would have won by 31 ... f5! 32 Kh1 g5 33 Kg1 h5 34 Kh1 h4 35 Kg1 e4 36 fxe4 fxe4 37 Kh1 (or 37 f3 exf3 38 e4 g4 39 e5 g3) 37 ... Kg4 38 Kg2 h3+ 39 Kg1 Kf3 40 Kf1 g4.

30 ... b5!

‘Now Black also has an extra tempo (... a7-a6), which may prove useful.’ (Averbakh, Maizelis)

31 Kg1 f5 32 Kh1 g5 33 Kg1 h5 34 Kh1 g4

Wouldn’t you agree that this resembles a study?



35 e4

If 35 fxg4, according to Averbakh, the simplest is 35 ... fxg4! 36 Kg1 e4, then 37 ... h4 and 38 ... g3! In the variation 35 ... hxg4 36 Kg1 f4 37 exf4 exf4 38 Kh1 Maizelis's recommendation of 38 ... g3? (with the idea 39 hxg3 fxg3 40 f3? g2+ 41 Kg1 Kg3 42 f4 Kxf4 43 Kxg2 Ke3 winning) leads to a draw after 39 fxg3! fxg3 40 hxg3 Kxg3 41 Kg1! Kf3 42 Kf1 Ke3 43 Ke1 Kd3 44 Kd1 Kc3 45 a4!

However, even in this case grandmaster Speelman discovered a win: 38 ... f3! (instead of 38 ... g3?) 39 Kg1 Kh4, for example: 40 Kh1 Kg5 41 h3 gxh3 42 Kh2 Kg4 43 Kg1 Kf4 44 Kh2 Ke4 45 Kxh3 (45 Kg3 h2!) 45 ... Kd3 46 Kg4 Ke2 47 Kg3 a6!, or 40 Kf1 Kh5! 41 Ke1 Kg5 42 Kf1 (42 Kd2 Kh4) 42 ... Kf4 43 Ke1 Ke4 44 Kd2 Kd4 45 Kc2 Kc4 46 Kd2 Kb3 47 Ke3 Kxa3 48 Kf4 Kxb4 49 Kxg4 a5.

35 ... fxe4! 36 fxe4

Or 36 fxg4 hxg4 37 Kg1 e3 38 fxe3 e4 39 Kh1 g3.

36 ... h4 37 Kg1 g3! 38 hxg3 hxg3 0-1

39 fxg3 Kxg3 etc. The same procedure was employed in the pawn ending that arose in the game Sveshnikov-Kasparov (47th USSR Championship, Minsk 1979), only Akiba's king ran along the third rank from h3, and mine from a3.

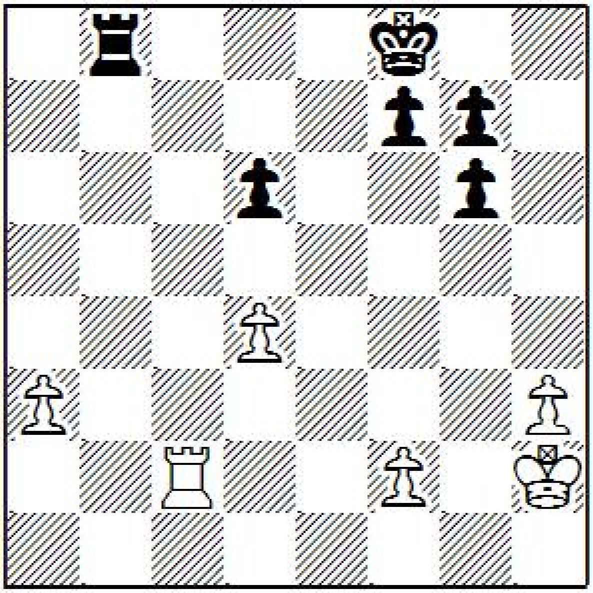
In the 13th round Rubinstein also completely crushed Schlechter, the then contender to the throne; according to Lasker, ‘he played this game with exceptional power, and at times very subtly.’

And about the following complicated rook endgame, which was published in chess magazines around the world, the champion said: ‘The skill with which Rubinstein conducted this ending cannot be praised too highly.’

Game 63

R.Spielmann-A.Rubinstein

St Petersburg 1909, 17th round



For a draw it is sufficient for White to give up his weak a3- and d4-pawns for the d6-pawn. But, amazingly, he is not able to do this!

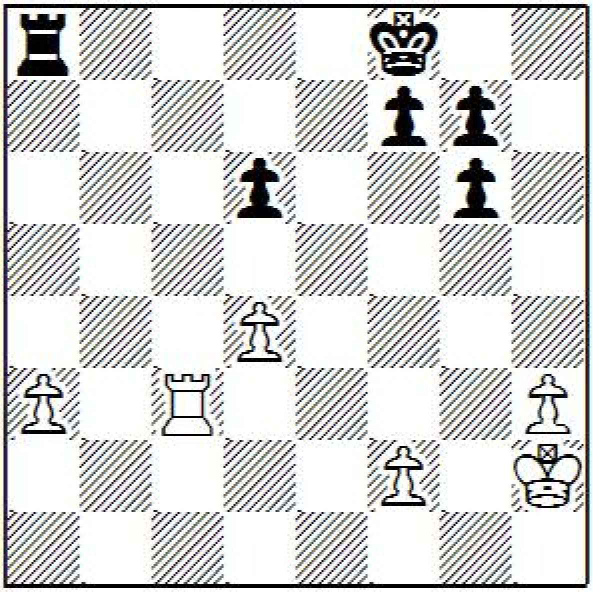
40 ... Ra8!

‘By 40 ... Rb3 41 Ra2 Rd3 it is possible to win a pawn, but then after 42 a4! Rxd4 43 a5 Rc4 44 a6 Rc8 45 a7 Ra8 46 Kg3 and Kf3-e3-d4 there can be no question of Black winning. If he tries to capture the a7-pawn, he loses the pawn endgame.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)

41 Rc3

A difficult choice. ‘As a rule, one should try to place the rook behind a passed pawn,’ writes Spielmann. ‘However, this is advantageous if the pawn has already reached the middle of the board or crossed it: then the rook behind the passed pawn has freedom to manoeuvre. But here 41 Ra2 would have completely paralysed White’s game after 41 ... Ra4! 42 Kg3 Ke7! (but not 42 ... Rxd4? 43 a4 Rc4 44 a5 Rc7 45 a6 Ra7 46 Kf4 Ke7 47 Ke4 Ke6 48 Kd4 with a draw) 43 Kf3 Ke6 44 Ke4 d5+ 45 Ke3 Kf5 and Black wins.’

But Levenfish and Smyslov pointed out 45 Kd3! Kd6 46 Kc3 Kc6 47 Kd3 Kb5 48 Rb2+ with equality. It would appear that if 45 ... Kf5 they had in mind 46 Kc3 with the idea of 47 Kb3 Rxd4 48 a4! Rd3+ 49 Kb4 Rxh3 50 a5 etc. Here is their main variation, where ‘Spielmann would apparently have gained a draw’: 44 ... g5 (instead of 44 ... d5+) 45 Ra1 f6 46 Ra2 f5+ 47 Kd3 Kd5 48 Kc3 Rc4+ 49 Kb3 Rxd4 50 a4 Rd3+ (or 50 ... Kc6 51 a5 Kb7 52 a6+ Ka7 53 Ra5 Rf4 54 Rd5 Rxf2 55 Rxd6 Rf3+ 56 Kc4 Rxh3 57 Rg6 g4 58 Kb5 Rb3+ 59 Ka5) 51 Kb4 Rxh3 52 a5 Rh8 53 a6 Ke4 54 a7 Ra8 55 Kb5 Kf3 56 Kb6.



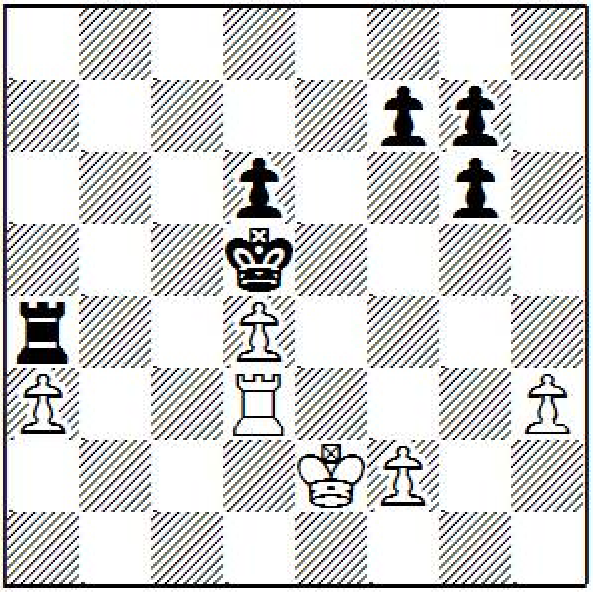
41 ... Ra4 42 Rd3 Ke7 43 Kg3

‘Of course, 43 d5 was necessary, to keep the black king further away: if 43 ... Kf6 there is 44 Rf3+, and if 43 ... f5 – 44 Re3+ and Re6.’ (Lasker)

However, in my opinion here too after 43 ... g5! 44 Kg3 Kf6 45 Rf3+ Kg6 White faces difficult problems: ... Rd4 is threatened, and if 46 Rd3, then 46 ... f6 and ... Kf5-e5 is possible.

43 ... Ke6 44 Kf3 Kd5 45 Ke2

‘It was worth considering 45 h4, which would have blocked the doubled g-pawns and restrained Black’s activity on the other wing.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)



45 ... g5!

‘Avoiding a cunning trap: if 45 ... Rxd4? 46 Ke3!, and only White can win.’ (Averbakh) ‘The outside passed a-pawn does not allow Black to go in for the exchange of rooks.’ (Spielmann)

46 Rb3 f6

After 46 ... Kxd4 (46 ... Rxd4? 47 Rd3!) Spielmann gives 47 Rb7 and Averbakh adds 47 ... f6 (47 ... Rxa3 48 Rxf7 Rxh3 49 Rxg7 is level) 48 Rxg7 Rxa3 49 h4! gxh4 50 Rg4+ Kc3 51 Rxh4 ‘with good drawing chances’, while Levenfish and Smyslov play 51 ... Ra2+ and write: ‘In our view, in this position too White’s defence involves great difficulties.’

47 Ke3

Now after 47 Rb7 Rxa3 48 Rxg7 Rxh3 all the same the d-pawn cannot be defended.’ (Spielmann)

47 ... Kc4! (once again: 47 ... Rxd4? 48 Rd3) **48 Rd3 d5 49 Kd2 Ra8**

The rook switches from defence to attack. ‘Black’s plan becomes clear. White ends up in zugzwang.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)

50 Kc2 (50 Ke3?! Rb8 51 Kd2 Rb2+ 52 Ke3 Ra2 wins)

50 ... Ra7! 51 Kd2 Re7!

‘As a result of all these manoeuvres White is forced to give up one of his pawns without any compensation.’ (Spielmann)

52 Rc3+

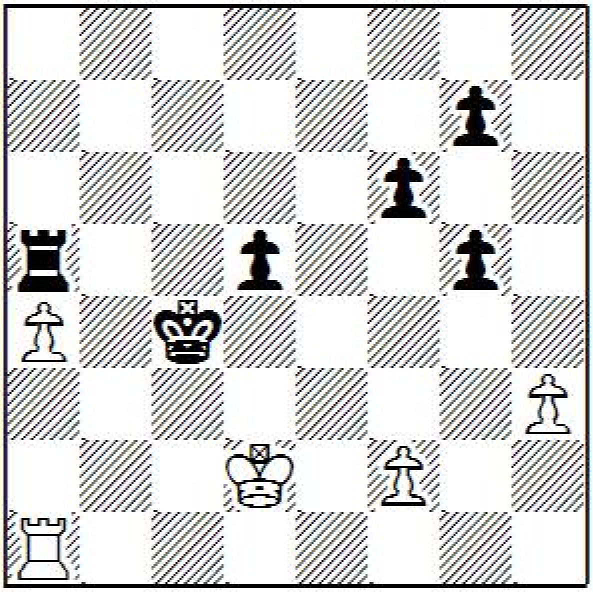
‘White cannot avoid the loss of a pawn: if 52 Re3, then 52 ... Rb7! 53 Rd3 Rb2+.’ (Lasker) Or 52 Kc2 Re2+ 53 Rd2 Rxd2+ 54 Kxd2 Kb3! and wins (Spielmann).

52 ... Kxd4 53 a4! Ra7 54 Ra3 Ra5

‘It is still unfavourable for Black to go into the pawn ending. Therefore he blocks the pawn, to be free to strengthen his position.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)

55 Ra1 Kc4

‘A typical plan: Black takes his king to a5, freeing his rook to attack the opponent’s weak pawns.’ (Averbakh)



56 Ke3?!

Spielmann makes no comment at this point, but analysts from the late-20th century point out the strongest defence – launching a counterattack by 56 Rc1+ Kb4 57 Rb1+! Kxa4 (57 ... Ka3 58 Rb7 Rxa4 59 Rxg7 Rf4 60 Ke2

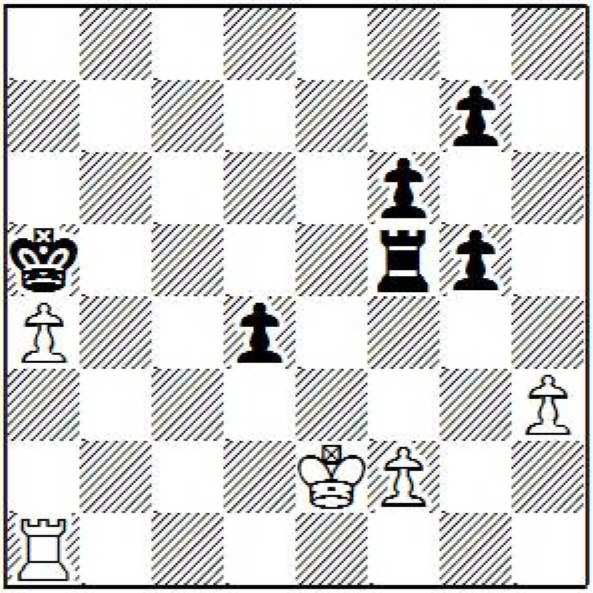
Kb3 61 Rc7! Averbakh) 58 Kd3 Rc5 (risky is 58 ... Rb5?! 59 Ra1+ Kb4 60 Kd4) 59 Kd4 Rc2 60 Rb7 Rxf2 61 Rxg7 ‘with drawing chances.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)

And indeed, although the position after 61 ... Rd2+ 62 Kc5 Kb3 63 Rf7 Kc3 64 Rxf6 d4 looks dangerous for White, I have been unable to find a clear win for Black: 65 Ra6! d3 66 Ra3+ Kb2 67 Kb4 Rd1 68 Rc3 etc.

56 ... d4+! 57 Kd2 Rf5! 58 Ke1

If 58 a5, then simply 58 ... Rxf2+ 59 Ke1 Rb2 (but not 59 ... Rh2? 60 Ra4+ Kb5 61 a6!) 60 a6 Rb8 61 a7 Ra8 62 Kd2 Kc5 63 Kd3 Kb6 64 Kxd4 Rxa7 wins.

58 ... Kb4 59 Ke2 Ka5!



‘The king blocks the passed pawn, and the rook begins eliminating the white pawns. Black would have lost his advantage after 59 ... Ra5? 60 Kd3 Rxa4 61 Rxa4+ Kxa4 62 Kxd4.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)

60 Ra3 Rf4 61 Ra2 (no better was 61 Kf1 Rh4 62 Kg2 Kb4! 63 Ra1 d3 64 a5 d2 65 a6 Rh8 66 a7 Ra8 67 Kf3 Rxa7 and wins) **61 ... Rh4 62 Kd3**

Or 62 Ra3 Kb4!

62 ... Rxh3+ 63 Kxd4 Rh4+ 64 Kd3 Rxa4 65 Re2 Rf4

Here White could have resigned, but Spielmann most probably remembers that it is never too late to resign ...

66 Ke3 Kb6 67 Rc2 Kb7 68 Rc1 Ra4 69 Rh1 Kc6 70 Rh7 Ra7 71 Ke4 Kd6 72 Kf5 (hastening the end) **72 ... g6+! 73 Kxg6 Rxh7 74 Kxh7 Ke5 75 Kg6 g4 0-1**

This is an eternally living, classic rook endgame! As also are his finish with Lasker (*Game No.61*), Rubinstein's miraculous saving of his game with Tarrasch (San Sebastian 1911), and his incisive wins over Alekhine (Carlsbad 1911) and Schlechter (San Sebastian 1912).

Talking about Rubinstein's merits in the field of the endgame, I should mention that by a process of experimentation the leading masters of that era discovered the positions that became theoretical and ended up in all the endgame books. In the collection of the 'great Akiba' there are masses of such endings, each one more subtle and prettier than the last! For example, bishop against knight – the instructive conversion of a positional advantage in his game with Réti (Gothenburg 1920).

Or rook and pawn against bishop and pawn. First Rubinstein, with the rook, defeated Salwe in Prague 1909 (White – Kg3, Bg5, Ïh4; Black – Ke4, Rf8, Ïh5), where half a century later Baranov discovered in the course of things a study-like draw, and a further nine years later Maizelis pointed out what was after all the correct way to win ... Then Rubinstein, on ending up in a difficult position in his game with Tartakower (Vienna 1922), found a quite amazing draw, this time with the bishop (White – Kf3, Bc1, Ïg4; Black – Kd3, Rg8, Ïg5; the bypass by the king from below does not work because of Bxg5!).

As a result of a fascinating tournament race in St Petersburg 1909, it was only thanks to scoring 9½ out of 10(!) in the middle of the tournament and winning at the end against Teichmann that Lasker was able to catch his unexpected rival and share first place with him. He and Rubinstein finished 3½ points ahead of their nearest pursuers! It became clear that there had appeared in Russia a worthy successor to Chigorin's glory – a very real challenger for the title of world champion. One noteworthy detail: in the secondary All-Russian tournament for amateurs the winner was the future chess king, the 16-year-old Alexander Alekhine ...

A turning point in Rubinstein's fate was the major international tournament in San Sebastian (1911), where the 22-year-old Capablanca made his debut. The talented Cuban quickly took the lead, whereas Akiba started slowly. 'He lost at least two and a half points,' writes Mieses in the tournament book, 'since in his games with Teichmann, Vidmar, Bernstein, Marshall and Spielmann he missed a clear win due to careless play (which earlier had never happened with him!).’

However, two rounds before the finish Rubinstein nevertheless caught up with the leader, by defeating him brilliantly in their individual meeting.

Game 64

A.Rubinstein-J.R.Capablanca

San Sebastian 1911, 13th round

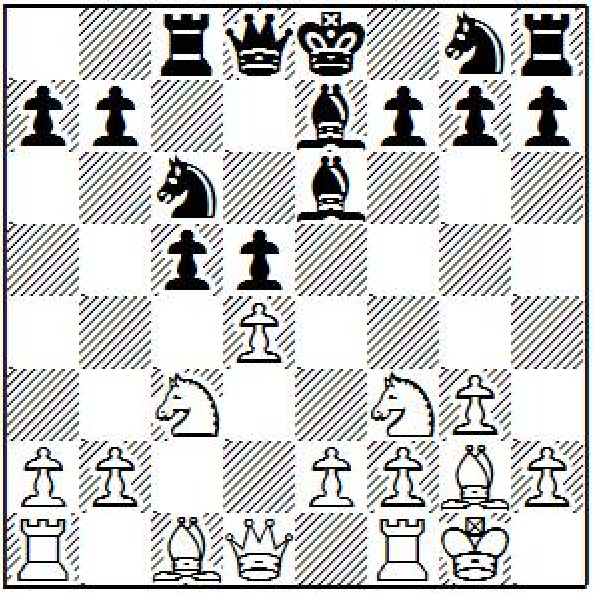
Queen’s Gambit D33

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 c5 3 c4 e6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 g3 Be6?!

‘In making the text move I was trying to avoid the beaten track. 6 ... Nf6 is the normal move in this variation. White’s development was first introduced by Schlechter and elaborated later on by Rubinstein. It aims at the isolation of Black’s d-pawn, against which the white pieces are gradually concentrated.’ (Capablanca)

7 Bg2 Be7 8 0-0 Rc8?!

As before 8 ... Nf6 was better (*Game No.75*).



9 dxc5 Bxc5 10 Ng5!?

‘I had not yet learned of the attack founded on Ng5 and the exchange of the bishop at e6.’ (Capablanca) Another attempt to exploit Black’s delay in developing his g8-knight is 10 Na4!? Be7 11 Be3.

10 ... Nf6 11 Nxe6 fxe6 12 Bh3!

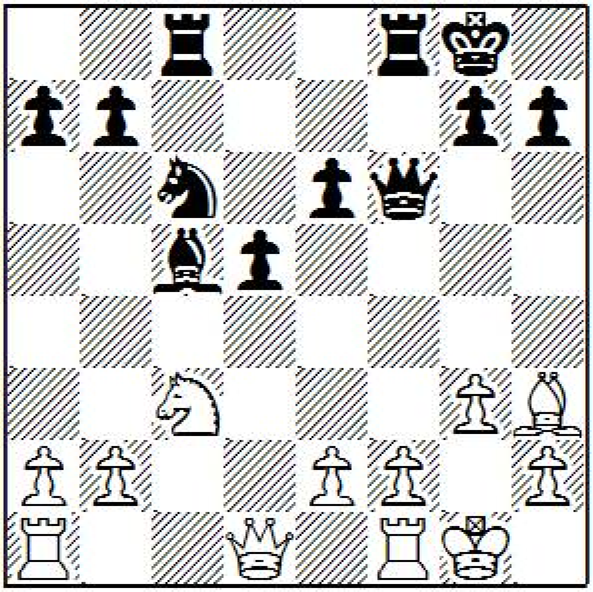
‘The start of a complicated combination. This is not the only way to develop White’s initiative. The natural 12 e4 also came into consideration, for example: 12 ... dxe4 13 Qb3!? (13 Nxe4 Qxd1 14 Rxd1 Nxe4 15 Bxe4 0-0 16 Be3) 13 ... Qe7 14 Nxe4, or 12 ... d4 (*! – G. K.*) 13 Na4 Be7 (13 ... Qe7?! 14 Nxc5 Qxc5 15 Qb3) 14 Qb3 and it is hard for Black to defend (Razuvaev). But in my view, after 14 ... Qd7! 15 Bd2 0-0 the situation is completely unclear.

12 ... Qe7 13 Bg5 0-0?!

‘Too late! Now a storm breaks out.’ (Kmoch) ‘This is a mistake. The right move was 13 ... Rd8 in order to get the rook away from the line of the bishop at h3 and at the same time to support the d-pawn. Against the text move White makes a very fine combination, which I had seen but which I thought could be defeated.’ (Capablanca)

14 Bxf6 Qxf6?

‘I considered 14 ... gxf6, which it seemed would give me a playable game, but I thought White’s combination unsound and therefore let him play it, to my lasting regret.’ (Capablanca) The capture with the pawn was indeed the lesser evil: although after 15 Nxd5! exd5 16 Bxc8 Rxc8 17 Qxd5+ Kh8 18 e3 Rd8 19 Qf5 White has an obvious advantage, it is not so easy to convert it.



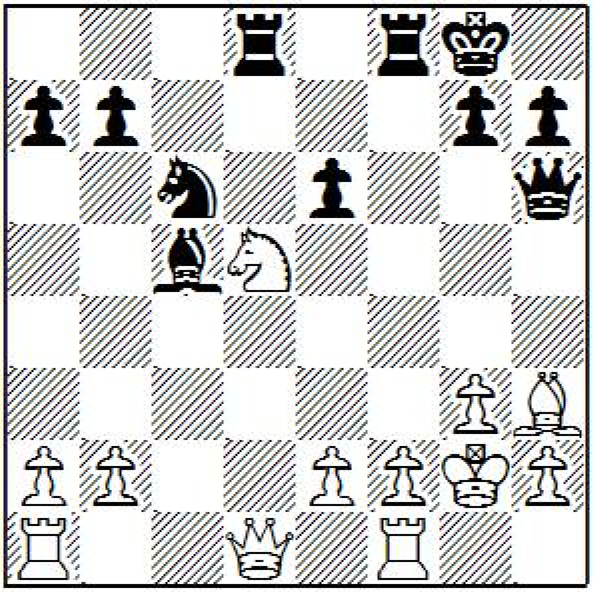
15 Nxd5! Qh6

But not 15 ... exd5? 16 Qxd5+ Kh8 17 Bxc8 or 15 ... Bxf2+? 16 Kg2 Qf7 17 Nf4.

16 Kg2!

Capa had only reckoned on 16 Bg2? Ne5! with an excellent game for Black: 17 Nf4 (17 Rc1? Qxc1! 18 Qxc1 Bxf2+) 17 ... Ng4 18 h3 (18 Nh3 Bxf2+) 18 ... Nxf2 19 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 20 Kxf2 g5 winning.

16 ... Rcd8 (in Capa’s words, ‘submitting to the inevitable’)



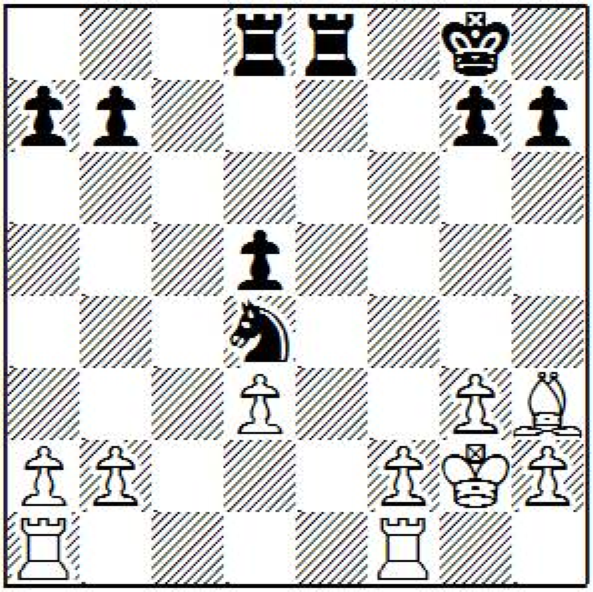
17 Qc1!!

A brilliant stroke, envisaged beforehand, which replicates in amazing fashion the game with Lasker (*Game No.61*). Rubinstein defeated the two champions using practically one and the same device!

17 ... exd5

There is nothing else: 17 ... Rxd5? 18 Qxh6 gxh6 19 Bxe6+ and Bxd5; 17 ... Qxc1? 18 Bxe6+ Kh8 19 Raxc1 etc.

18 Qxc5 Qd2 19 Qb5 Nd4 20 Qd3 Qxd3 21 exd3 Rfe8



‘In the resulting ending White has an extra pawn and a good bishop, and hence winning chances. Black’s only trump is his slight lead in development.’ (Razuvaev)

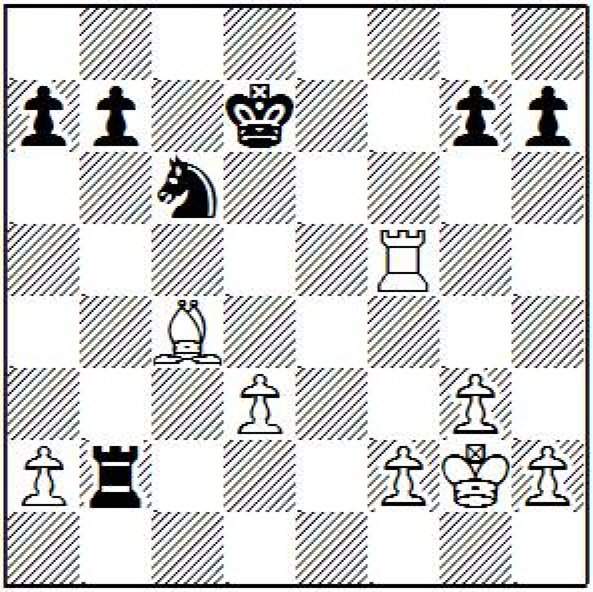
22 Bg4!?

In the event of 22 Rfe1 Nc2 23 Rxe8+ Rxe8 Black has definite counterplay.’ (Tarrasch) But nevertheless it is insufficient after 24 Rd1. Capablanca gave 24 Rc1!? Re2 25 Kf1 Nd4 (25 ... Rd2 26 Be6+ Kf8 27 Bxd5) 26 Rc8+ Kf7 27 Rc7+ Re7 28 Rc5 and ‘wins’, and criticised the bishop move: ‘This gives Black a chance.’

22 ... Rd6! 23 Rfe1 Rxe1 24 Rxe1 Rb6! 25 Re5

To overcome Capablanca’s stubborn resistance, very fine endgame technique is required. Also possible was 25 b3!? Ra6 26 Re5! Rxa2 27 Rxd5 Nc6 (27 ... Nxb3? 28 Be6+ Kf8 29 Rf5+ and Bxb3) 28 Be6+ Kf8 29 Rd7 Ne5 30 Rxb7, ‘and White should win quickly.’ (Razuvaev)

25 ... Rxb2 26 Rxd5 Nc6 27 Be6+ Kf8 28 Rf5+ (but not 28 Rd7?! Ne5) **28 ... Ke8 29 Bf7+ Kd7 30 Bc4**



30 ... a6?!

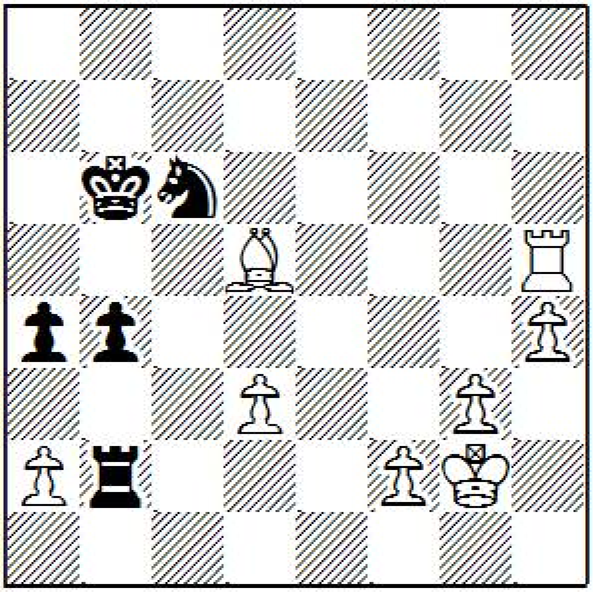
‘Black’s only chance is his extra pawn on the queenside,’ writes Razuvaev, and he attaches an exclamation mark to this move. But Capablanca thought otherwise: ‘A bad move, which gives away any legitimate chance Black had to draw. It loses a very important move. The proper way was to play 30 ... Kd6. If then 31 Rb5 (*? – G. K.*) 31 ... Rxb5 32 Bxb5 Nd4 followed by ... b7-b5 and White would have an exceedingly difficult game to draw on account of the dominating position of the knight at d4 in conjunction with the extra pawn on the queenside and the awkward position of White’s king.’

I agree that 30 ... Kd6! would have given Black better chances, for example: 31 Rd5+ Ke7 32 Rb5?! (a basically incorrect idea) 32 ... Rxb5 33 Bxb5 Nd4 34 Ba4 b5 35 Bd1 a5! (but not 35 ... Kd6 36 f4 Kc5 37 Kf2 Kb4 38 Ke3 Kc3 39 g4 a5 40 f5 h6 41 h4 winning) 36 f4 Nc6 37 Kf1 Nb4 38 a3 Nc6 39 Kf2 Kd6 40 Ke3 Kc5 with sufficient compensation for the pawn.

However, after 31 Rf7! impassive computer analysis nevertheless promises White a win: 31 ... b5 32 Bb3 Nd4 33 Rxa7 Nxb3 34 axb3 Rxb3 35 Rxg7 Rxd3 36 Rxh7 Kc6 37 Rh8 Kc7 38 Rh4 Kd6 39 Rb4 Kc5 40 Rb1 b4 41 h4, or 31 ... Ne5 32 Rxg7 b5 33 Bb3 a5 (33 ... Nxd3 34 Rxa7 Rxf2+ 35 Kg1 Rb2 36 Rxh7 Nc1 37 Rh5 Nxb3 38 Rxb5 Rb1+ 39 Kg2 Nd2 40 Rxb1 Nxb1 41 a4 Nc3 42 a5 also wins) 34 d4 Nd3 35 Kf3 Nc1 36 Bg8

Nxa2 37 Rxh7 Nc3 38 Rh6+ Ke7 39 Ra6 a4 40 h4 Nd1 41 d5 Rxf2+ 42 Ke4.

31 Rf7+ Kd6 32 Rxg7 b5 33 Bg8 a5 34 Rxh7 a4 35 h4 b4 36 Rh6+ Kc5 37 Rh5+ Kb6 38 Bd5?



'With these three last moves White again gives Black a chance. The text move is a downright blunder.' (Capablanca) I think that this was the result of nervous fatigue: generally speaking, Rubinstein, like Fischer half a century later, had an obvious soft spot for his light-squared bishop and he more than once performed miracles with it ... There was a comparatively easy win by 38 Bc4!, and if 38 ... b3, then 39 axb3 a3 40 Rb5+ Kc7 41 b4.

38 ... b3?

Missing an unexpected saving chance – 38 ... Rxa2!! 'White's best continuation then would have been 39 Bc4 (39 Bxa2? b3) 39 ... Rc2 40 Rb5+ Kc7 41 Bg8 a3 42 h5 a2 43 Bxa2 Rxa2 44 h6 Ra6! (but not 44 ... Ra8? 45 g4!) with excellent chances for a draw.' (Capablanca) The computer confirms this evaluation: 45 g4 Ne7 46 g5 (46 h7 Ra8) 46 ... Rb6 47 Rxb6 Kxb6 48 f4 b3 49 h7 Ng6 50 f5 b2 51 fxg6 b1Q 52 h8Q Qc2+ 53 Kf3 Qxd3+ 54 Kf4 Qd2+ 55 Kf5 Qc2+ with a draw.

39 Rh6!? Rc2 40 h5 seems tempting. Here Razuvaev gives two supposedly winning variations for White: 40 ... b3 41 Re6 b2 (*? – G. K.*) 42

Ba2 Rc1 43 h6 Ra1 44 h7 Rxa2 45 h8Q b1Q 46 Qb8+, and 40 ... a3 41 Re6 a2 (*? – G. K.*) 42 Re1 Nd4 43 h6 b3 44 h7 Rc8 45 Bg8.

However, after 40 ... b3 41 Re6 stronger is 41 ... Rc5! 42 Bxc6 Rxc6 43 Rxc6+ Kxc6 44 h6 b2 45 h7 b1Q 46 h8Q Qxd3 with a probable draw (47 Qe8+ Qd7). And, even worse, in the event of 40 ... a3! 41 Re6 Rc5! the advantage is altogether on the side of Black!

39 axb3 (39 Bxb3!? would also have won) **39 ... a3** (39 ... axb3 40 Rh6 wins) **40 Bxc6! Rxb3**

Or 40 ... a2 41 Rb5+ Ka6 42 Rb8! a1Q 43 Ra8+ and Rxa1.

41 Bd5 a2 42 Rh6+! 1-0

42 ... Ka7 43 Rh8 or 42 ... Ka5 43 Bc4! and the rook reaches the a-file in time.

But even so, first place went to Capablanca: in his last game Rubinstein failed to find a one-move win(!) against Schlechter. ‘He, of whom one of the acknowledged virtues is precisely his ability to win won positions, to general astonishment, in this game, such an important one for him, missed a certain chance.’ (Mieses) Thus on the chess scene there appeared a new, more fortunate contender for the chess crown ...

It is time to say something about the gigantic, staggeringly high-quality contribution of Rubinstein to modern opening theory. He discovered new paths in the most diverse variations of the Queen’s Gambit: apart from the ‘Rubinstein Attack’ given above and his systems in the Tarrasch Defence, there is his variation in the Queen’s Gambit Accepted – 1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3 e5 5 Bxc4 c5 6 0-0 a6 7 a4, which, incidentally, was also tested in the Botvinnik-Petrosian world championship match (Moscow 1963). And, now for Black, there is his highly popular Meran Variation in the Slav, opened to the world in his games with Teichmann (Carlsbad 1923) and Grünfeld (Meran 1924).

His interpretation of the English Opening in his game with Duras (Carlsbad 1911) became classical: 1 c4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 g3 Bb4 4 Bg2 0-0 5 Nf3 Re8 6 0-0 Nc6 7 Nd5! etc. Incidentally, it was in this encounter that he overpowered his opponent with the staggering positional move 27 Qf1!! His games are studded with similar gems – take the murderous manoeuvre 21 Nd1!! in his game with Tarrasch (Hastings 1922).

When the Nimzo-Indian Defence appeared – 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4, Rubinstein immediately devised the variation 4 e3 and 5 Ne2 against it (to avoid the spoiling of the pawn formation!), which even today is considered one of the most interesting and venomous, partly thanks to the match games Korchnoi-Karpov (Baguio 1978). At the same time he developed the fundamental Anti-Queen's Indian variation 3 Nf3 b6 4 g3, which for a long time became White's main weapon in this opening.

In all the openings which he played against 1 e4, original systems and variations bearing his name have been retained! In the Sicilian Defence – 1 ... c5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5; in the French – 1 ... e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 or 3 ... Nf6 4 Bg5 dxe4, for example: 5 Nxe4 Nbd7 6 Nf3 Be7 7 Nxf6+ Nxf6 8 Bd3 b6 9 Ne5 Bb7 10 Bb5+ c6 11 Bxc6+?! Bxc6 12 Nxc6 Qd5!, and after 13 Ne5 Qxg2 14 Qf3 Qxf3 15 Nxf3 Rc8 Black finally won the endgame (Schlechter-Rubinstein, San Sebastian 1912). And whereas Akiba's Sicilian idea has not found any followers, his exchanging variation in the French is still constantly the centre of attention. It is possible even, that it was because of his successes with Black after ... dxe4 that Nimzowitsch became such a fervent devotee of 3 e5.

In the Four Knights Game – 1 ... e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 – it was Rubinstein who suggested the variation with 4 ... Nd4!? (nowadays that is how Kramnik replies; it was because of the knight move that White stopped playing this opening). In the Chigorin Variation of the Ruy Lopez, in reply to the clamping d4-d5 he devised an elegant defensive plan with ... Nc6-d8, ... Nf6-e8, ... g7-g6 and ... Ng7, ... f7-f6 and ... Nf7, as in his games with Thomas and Bogoljubow (Baden-Baden 1925).

The master also left his deep mark in the Open Variation of the Ruy Lopez. The following game occurred in one of Rubinstein's triumphal tournaments of 1912 (San Sebastian, Pistyan, Breslau and Vilna).

Game 65

A.Alekhine-A.Rubinstein

All-Russian master tournament, Vilna 1912

Ruy Lopez C83

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 d5 8 dxe5 Be6 9 c3 Be7

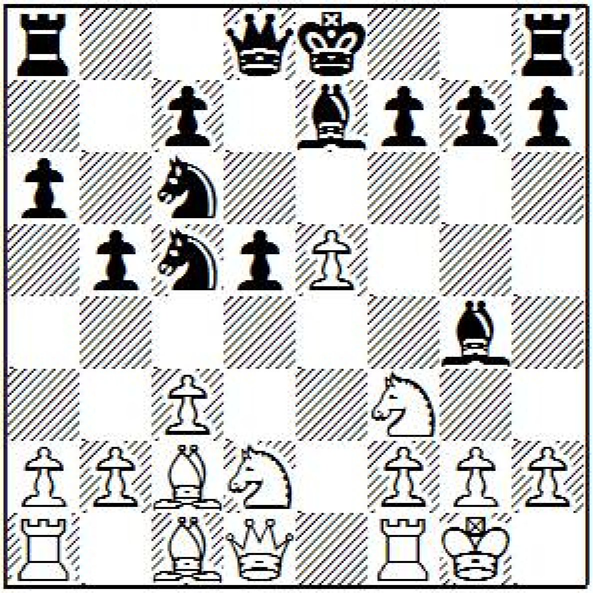
9 ... Bc5 is more popular (*Game Nos.28, 66*). Towards the end of the 20th century, largely through the efforts of Korchnoi, this move so troubled

White, that he switched to the variation 9 Nbd2 Nc5 10 c3, allowing, apart from 10 ... Bg4 11 Be2 Be7, the problematic 10 ... d4!?

10 Nbd2 Nc5 11 Bc2 Bg4

By transposition of moves one of the critical positions has been reached. 11 ... 0-0 is also played, as well as 11 ... d4!? – earlier this was rejected because of 12 Ne4 Bd5? 13 Nxc5 Bxc5 14 Nxd4 (Tarrasch-Post, Mannheim 1914), or 12 ... dxc3?! 13 Nxc5 Bxc5 14 Be4! (Capablanca-Chajes, New York 1915 and 1916).

But then after 12 Ne4 they found 12 ... d3! 13 Nxc5 dxc2 14 Qxd8+ Rxd8 15 Nxe6 fxe6 16 Be3 Rd5 17 Rfc1 Nxe5 18 Nxe5 Rxe5 with equal chances and then they began trying 12 Nb3 d3 13 Bb1 (13 Nxc5 dxc2 14 Qxd8+ Rxd8 is level) 13 ... Nxb3 14 axb3 Bf5 15 Be3 0-0 16 Bd4!? (16 Nd4 Nxd4 17 cxd4 c5!) 16 ... Qd5 17 Re1 with a sharp game (Topalov-Piket, Antwerp 1997), or 12 cxd4 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 Qxd4 14 Nf3 (14 Qe2 0-0) 14 ... Qxd1 15 Rxd1 0-0 (slightly worse is 15 ... Bg4 16 Be3 0-0 17 h3! Leko-Khalifman, Budapest 6th matchgame 2000) 16 Ng5 h6 17 Bh7+ Kh8 18 Nxe6 Nxe6 19 Be4 Rad8 20 Be3 Bg5 with equality (Anand-A. Greenfeld, Haifa rapidplay 2000).



12 h3?!

This and White’s subsequent inaccuracies are explained by the 20-year-old Alekhine’s lack of experience and the fact that the theory of this variation was undeveloped. Is it really worth driving the bishop to g6, if it is aiming for there anyway? Today the main line is 12 Re1! Qd7, for example:

1) 13 Nb3 Ne6 14 h3 Bh5 15 Bf5 Ncd8 (or 15 ... Bg6 16 Bg4 h5 17 Bxe6 fxe6 18 Be3 0-0 19 Nc5 Bxc5 20 Bxc5 Rf4 21 Nd4 Re4 with level chances Leko-Piket, Wijk aan Zee 2000) 16 Be3 a5 17 Bc5 a4 18 Bxe7 Qxe7 with approximate equality (Karpov-Korchnoi, Baguio City 28th matchgame 1978);

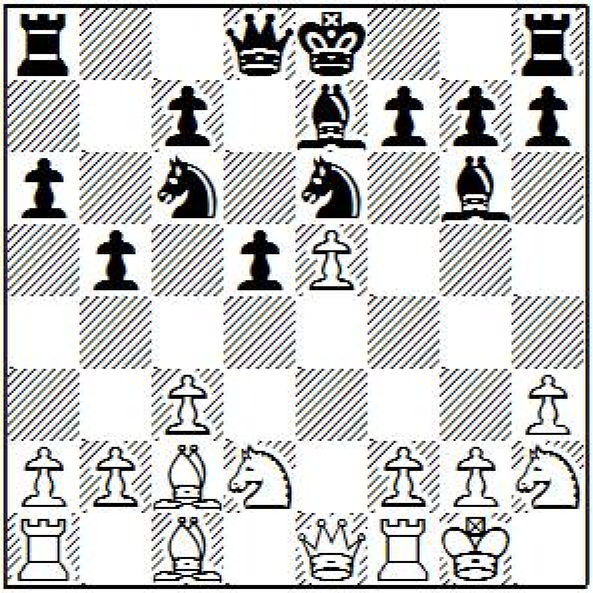
2) 13 Nf1!? (Bronstein's cunning manoeuvre) 13 ... Rd8 (13 ... Bh5 14 Ng3 Bg6 15 h4!? 0-0 16 h5 is also played, which demonstrates again that 12 h3 is unnecessary) 14 Ne3 Bh5 (dangerous is 14 ... Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Nxe5 16 Qg3 Ng6 17 Nf5 Ne6 18 h4 Bf6 19 Bg5 etc.) 15 b4!? (15 Nf5 0-0) 15 ... Ne6 (15 ... Ne4? 16 Nxd5) 16 g4! Bg6 17 Nf5 0-0 18 a4 Rfe8 19 axb5 axb5 20 Bd3 with appreciable pressure (Galkin-Sorokin, Ekaterinburg 1997; Khalifman-Marin, Istanbul Olympiad 2000).

12 ... Bh5 13 Qe1?! (13 Re1 is still better) **13 ... Ne6 14 Nh2?!**

White wants to advance his f- and g-pawns with gain of tempi, but an unpleasant surprise awaits him. A game from our times went 14 Bf5 Bg6 15 Bxg6 fxg6! (following the classic example!) 16 Nb3 0-0 (16 ... Qd7!?) 17 Nfd4 Ncxd4 18 Nxd4 Qd7 19 Be3 c5 20 Nxe6 Qxe6 21 f4 g5 with excellent play for Black (Y. Grünfeld-Stean, Skara 1980).

14 ... Bg6

What should White do now?



15 Bxg6 (later 15 Bb1!? was played, with the idea of f2-f4) **15 ... fxg6!!**

But this is a surprise: in such cases every follower of the Steinitz School would without thinking have captured towards the centre (... hxg6), whereas Akiba evaluated the position concretely. A phenomenal move (for the sake of which, strictly speaking, this not very outstanding game is given here). Of course, today this is already a typical procedure, but then ... How hard it was to go against the established dogmas! The game is important mainly because it clearly demonstrates that, thanks to his chess genius, Rubinstein was capable of blazing completely new trails.

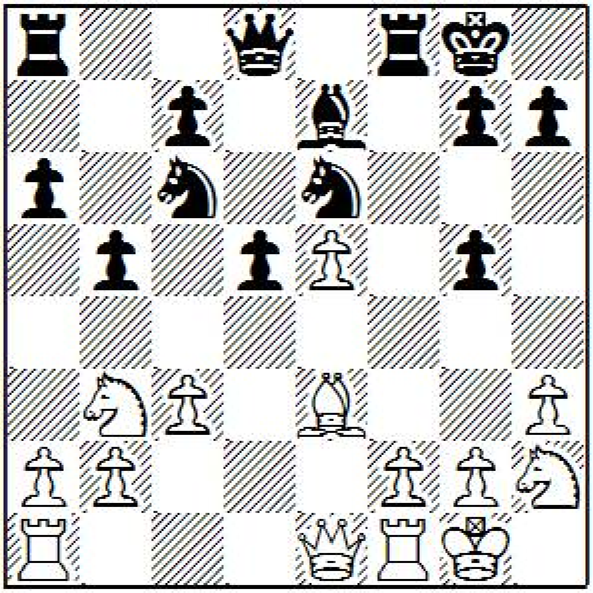
16 Nb3

Hardly any better was 16 Ndf3 0-0 17 Be3 Rf5! with the intention of ... Qd7 and ... Raf8.

16 ... g5!

Preventing the supporting of the e5-pawn. Although 16 ... 0-0 17 f4 a5 18 Be3 a4 19 Nd4 Ncxd4 20 cxd4 c5 21 dxc5 d4 22 Bd2 Qd5 was also acceptable.

17 Be3 0-0



18 Nf3?

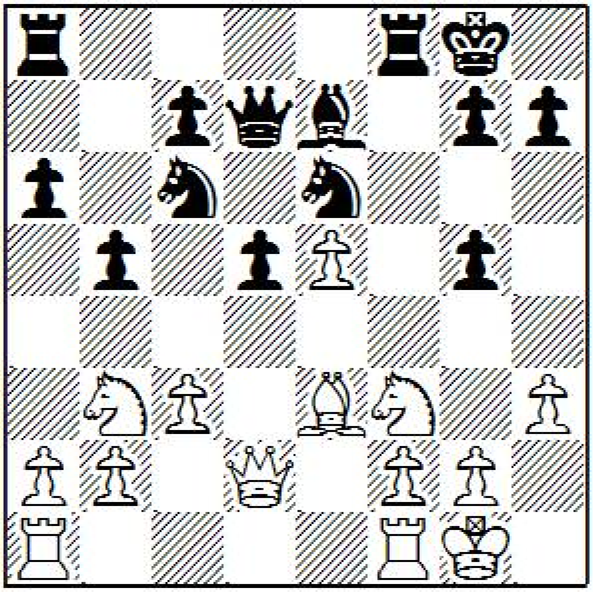
Again a poor move – one senses that the young Alekhine was stunned. It was not essential to lose this position, and White could still have saved himself by tempo play: 18 Qe2 Nxe5 19 Bxg5 Nxg5 20 Qxe5 Qd6 21 Ng4 with equality.

18 ... Qd7?

Undoubtedly stronger was the immediate 18 ... Rxf3! 19 gxf3 Nxe5 20 Qe2 Bd6 21 Nd4 Qd7 with excellent compensation for the exchange. However, as Razuvaev and Murakhveri write, ‘Rubinstein could sometimes procrastinate, but hurry – never!’

19 Qd2?

The decisive mistake. The only way to exploit Black’s delay was by 19 Qe2, and nothing terrible for White is apparent, for example: 19 ... Rf5 20 Nbd4 Ncxd4 21 cxd4 Raf8 22 a4!? (22 Nd2 c5) 22 ... Rxf3 23 gxf3 c5 24 dxc5 d4 25 Rfd1 Bxc5 26 axb5 axb5 27 Bc1 with an unclear game.



19 ... Rxf3! (better late than never ...) **20 gxf3 Nxe5 21 Qe2 Rf8 22 Nd2 Ng6!**

In order to jump to f4, weaving a mating net.

23 Rfe1 Bd6 24 f4?! (desperation) **24 ... Nexf4 25 Qf1 Nxh3+ 26 Kh1 g4 27 Qe2 Qf5 0-1**

The threat of ... Qh5 is irresistible, and White resigned.

As we have seen, Rubinstein was great in all stages of the game – in the opening, and in the middlegame, and in the endgame. But, in contrast to Tarrasch or Nimzowitsch, he never related his achievements in print, and so for a long time his special role in the development of chess was suppressed and remained underestimated. Careful analysis shows that modern chess, proceeding from the Botvinnik era, is very strongly influenced by the games of Rubinstein, who was, essentially, one of the fathers of modern chess history.

In the period 1909-1912 the strength of his play was certainly sufficient for him to issue a challenge to Lasker. A match between them at that time would have been very interesting, as would somewhat later – but also before the War! – have been the matches Lasker vs. Capablanca and Rubinstein vs. Capablanca. Alas, history knows of numerous instances when the logic of events was disrupted ... Either the War or, more probably, deficiencies of character, prevented Akiba from making the last, decisive step, and hopes of seeing a match between him and Lasker were never realised.

Rubinstein was an extraordinarily taciturn, modest and diffident person, but more importantly – completely impractical. By contrast, the enterprising Capablanca, after winning San Sebastian 1911 (only half a point ahead of his rival, who defeated him in their individual game and did not suffer a single defeat!), he promptly issued a challenge to Lasker. And although after Rubinstein's series of brilliant tournament victories in 1912 his rights to a match with Lasker were undisputed, negotiations with the world champion were manifestly delayed.

Talking about Lasker as a great psychologist, Botvinnik explains: 'He knew when he should avoid a match (the opponent was in good form) and when, on the contrary, he should aim for a fight! That is undoubtedly how he operated with Tarrasch, with Rubinstein, and with Capablanca ... But should this be condemned? There were no rules then for organising competitions for the world championship, and each could act at his own discretion. In this respect Lasker differed from Steinitz: the latter never avoided a contest.'

Yes, Lasker had a clear position regarding this: 'I was ready to play a match with any challenger, only if the chess world wished to see this match and confirmed this wish not only verbally, but also materially. Of course, I certainly did not want to be an object of exploitation. I was threatened by the fate of players, who either died of hunger, such as Kieseritzky, Zukertort or Mackenzie, or, like Pillsbury and Steinitz, ended up on social security and, degraded, in mental disorder, ended their days in hospital. I was ready to give my skill and thinking to the chess world and thereby enliven it, assisting the development of the game, but I demanded that it should take on the responsibility for this and bear it to the end.'

How very true! As, however, was the champion's rebuff to those who considered that chess could not be recognised as a profession: 'The millions of enthusiasts, who play through the games of masters, learn from them and obtain spiritual pleasure, should not hold such a point of view. Using such arguments, the musical world could deny a living to talented professional musicians, which, of course, would be obviously unjust. Only those who devote themselves entirely to a particular matter can create something great in that field.'

Settling Accounts in St Petersburg

The most significant chess event of those years was the super-tournament St Petersburg 1914, with the participation of the 45-year-old world champion Lasker and both the young contenders for this title – Rubinstein and Capablanca. For the first time the three leading chess organisations in the world – Russia, Germany and Great Britain – agreed that the winner of the tournament (if it should not be Lasker) would gain the right to play a match for the world championship under jointly drawn-up conditions, and moreover, he would automatically receive the title in the event of the champion defaulting! And Lasker, satisfied with a high appearance fee, agreed to this, thereby imparting an unusual intrigue to the event.

Such a distinctive candidates tournament was not entirely fair: a player who finished second after the champion would not gain any rights at all. Also imperfect was the tournament formula: a preliminary all-play-all of 11 participants, and then a double-double final for the first five ... with the preliminary results carried forward.

The exceptionally nervy, tense battle in the first stage produced a regrettable sensation: Rubinstein, who was out of practice, did not finish in the cherished five, letting slip a serious advantage against Capablanca (*Game No.82*) and then losing ‘grievously’ to Lasker and Alekhine ...

The Lasker-Rubinstein game was of great competitive significance. The champion struck his dangerous opponent a terrible blow, outplaying him literally out of nothing ... in a rook endgame – the stage where it was generally held that Akiba had no equal! This ending also found its way into books on the endgame.

Game 66

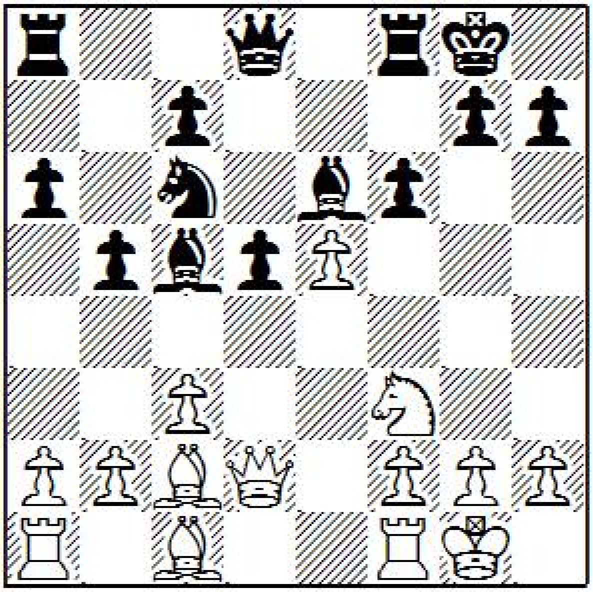
Em.Lasker-A.Rubinstein

St Petersburg 1914, preliminary tournament

Ruy Lopez C82

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 d5 8

dxe5 Be6 9 c3 Bc5 (9 ... Be7 – *Game No.65*) **10 Nbd2 0-0 11 Bc2 Nxd2?!** (nowadays 11 ... Bf5! is in vogue) **12 Qxd2! f6**



‘The comparatively best reply.’ (Keres) Chigorin played 12 ... Ne7 (*Game No.28*).

13 exf6 (13 Qd3!?) **13 ... Rxf6 14 Nd4**

14 Ng5 Bf5 15 a4 or 14 b4 Bb6 15 a4! is considered more energetic.

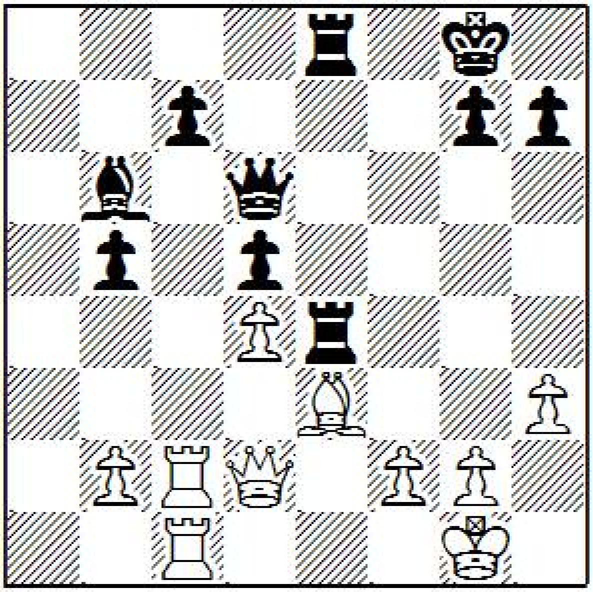
14 ... Nxd4 15 cxd4 Bb6

‘After Tarrasch’s recommendation of 15 ... Bd6!? there follows 16 Qe2 h6 17 a4 Rb8 18 axb5 axb5 19 Be3 with advantage to White.’ (Keres) However, according to Larsen, stronger is 16 ... Qd7! with equal chances.

16 a4 Rb8 17 axb5 axb5 18 Qc3 Qd6 19 Be3

The opinions of the theoreticians regarding this position are divided: some think that, thanks to his pressure on the c-file, White has the advantage, others that Black has a solid defence.

19 ... Bf5 20 Rfc1 Bxc2 21 Rxc2 Re8 22 Rac1 Rfe6 23 h3 Re4 24 Qd2



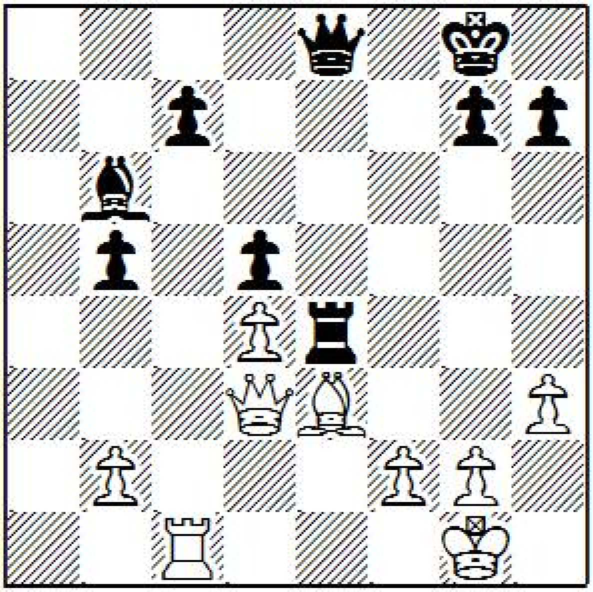
24 ... R8e6

Allowing White to exchange a pair of rooks. 24 ... Qe7 (after 24 ... Qd7?! 25 Rc6 the b5-pawn is threatened) 25 Rc6 (25 Qd3 Qb4) 25 ... Qh4 26 Rd1 Qe7 27 Qc3 does not offer full equality, although here it will not be possible to play f2-f3.

25 Rc6 Qd7

Quite safe was 25 ... Qxc6!? 26 Rxc6 Rxc6 27 Qb4 Bxd4! 28 Bxd4 (28 Qxb5 Rc5) 28 ... Rc4 29 Qxb5 Rcxd4 30 Qb8+ Kf7 31 Qxc7+ Re7 with equality.

26 Rxe6 Qxe6 27 Qd3 Qe8

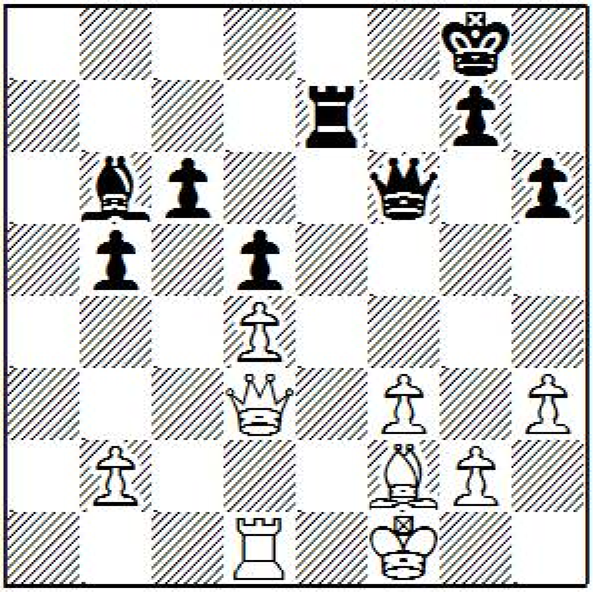


Black appears to have a quite normal position, and at least White does not have anything serious. But Lasker, not at all concerned by this, continues playing in his usual manner – for a long time he moves here and there, creating in the end an outstanding example of manoeuvring play!

28 Qc3 Kf7 29 Qd3 Kg8 30 Qc3 Qe6 31 Ra1 Qe8 32 Kf1 h6 33 Qd3 Kf7 34 Rc1 Kg8 35 Qb3 Qf7 36 Rd1 c6

Possibly an inaccuracy, but after 36 ... Qd7 37 f3 Black’s position is somewhat inferior.

37 f3! Qf6 38 Qd3 Re7 39 Bf2



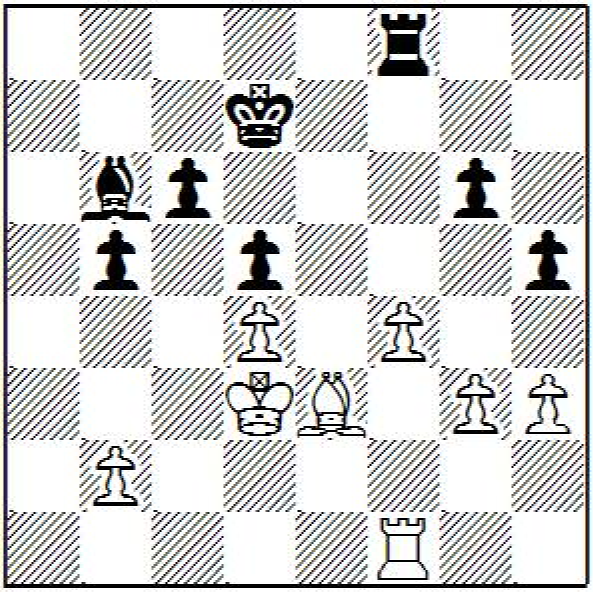
Gradually White has gained a ‘plus’: he has advanced f2-f3, he has fixed the pawn at c6, and he wants to exploit his pawn majority on the kingside. And yet, despite certain problems (the main one being a lack of counterplay!), Black should be able to draw.

39 ... Qd6 40 Qc2 Kf7 41 Rc1 Re6 42 Qf5+ Rf6 43 Qe5! Re6

43 ... Qd7 came into consideration, avoiding the exchange of queens, which turns out to favour White: he activates his king and sets about creating a passed pawn.

44 Qxd6 Rxd6 45 Ke2 Ke7 46 Kd3 Rg6 47 g3! Rf6 48 f4 Kd7 49 Re1 Rf8 50 Ra1 h5 51 Be3 g6 52 Rf1

With the intention of g3-g4 intending f4-f5. Stealthily, step by step, White imperceptibly increases his advantage.



52 ... Kd6?

In my opinion, this is already the decisive mistake: 52 ... Ke6! 53 g4 Bc7! was essential. White has made all his useful moves – what is he to do next? The computer 'looks at' the sharp 54 f5+! gxf5 55 Bh6! (55 gxh5? f4) 55 ... Rf7 56 g5, but after 56 ... Rh7 (but not 56 ... f4? 57 g6 Rf6 58 Re1+ Kf5 59 g7 Rg6 60 Re8 and the pawn queens) 57 Rg1 Rh8 58 g6 Rg8 59 g7 Bd6 60 Rg6+ Ke7 61 Ke3 c5 62 Bg5+ Kd7 63 Bf6 Ke8 64 dxc5 Kf7 65 Rh6 Bxc5+ 66 Kf4 d4 67 Rxh5 Kxf6 68 Rxf5+ Kxg7 69 Rxc5 Rd8 70 Rxb5 d3 71 Rg5+ Kf6 72 Rg1 Rh8 Black gains a draw.

53 g4! (proceeding to create a passed pawn) **53 ... hxg4**

If 53 ... Ke6, then 54 f5+! gxf5 55 gxh5 Bc7 56 Re1 Kd7 57 Bg5.

54 hxg4 c5?!

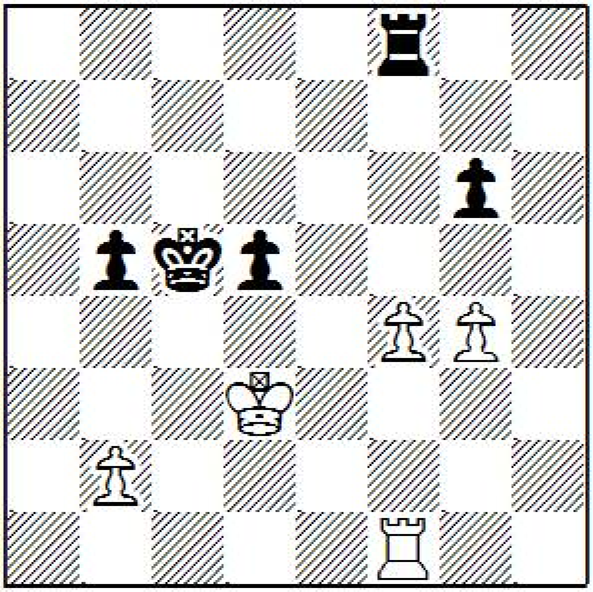
An attempt to create his own passed pawn. One can argue about whether this should have been played, but after 54 ... Ke6 55 Rh1 and Rh6 White simply has an advantage for free and every chance of winning – evidently Rubinstein did not believe that he would be able to defend here.

With amazing rapidity the position has been transformed from being almost equal to one that is highly unpleasant, even lost for Black. This truly is a gift of the great masters: the ability to create something ... out of nothing!

A further paradoxical feature of this game is that according to all the rules White has a ‘bad’ bishop (running up against its own d4-pawn), whereas Black’s is ‘good’. But with the rooks on and a superior pawn formation – a healthy extra pawn on the kingside, whereas the b2- and d4-pawns restrain three black pawns – this does not play any role! And in the end, trying to survive, Black himself goes in for the exchange of bishops ... Of course, Rubinstein, a great master of rook endings, fully understood the danger of his position, but he was hoping that he would be saved by the limited material remaining.

55 dxc5+ Bxc5 56 Bxc5+ Kxc5

A classic position.



57 f5

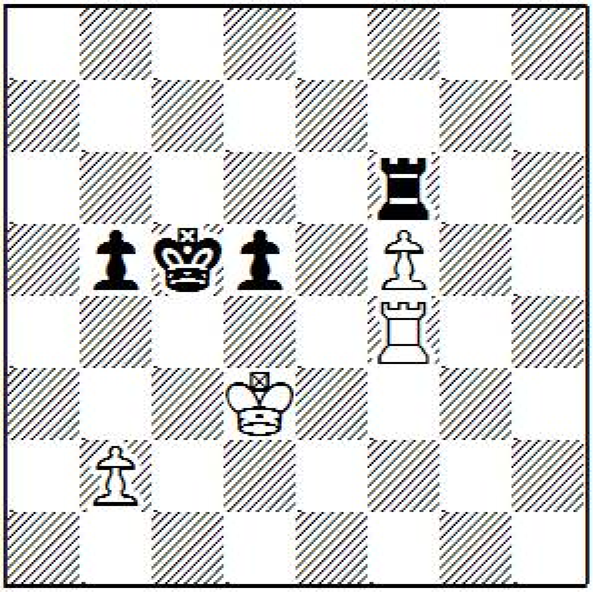
‘White creates an outside passed pawn, with his rook ideally placed – “*à la* Tarrasch”, as though urging on the passed pawn from behind, whereas the black rook is passive. The white king is also well placed: it stands in the path of the opponent’s passed pawn, securely blocking it.’ (Averbakh)

57 ... gxf5 58 gxf5 Rf6

‘The pawn has to be stopped. After 58 ... d4 59 f6 Kd5 60 f7 Ke5 61 b4 Kd5 62 Rf4 Ke5 63 Re4+ Kf5 64 Re1! Kf6 65 Kxd4 Rd8+ 66 Kc5 Kxf7 67 Kxb5 White wins easily.’ (Averbakh)

59 Rf4

The last critical position in this amazing game. Here, with the help of a computer, I was fortunate enough to discover something.

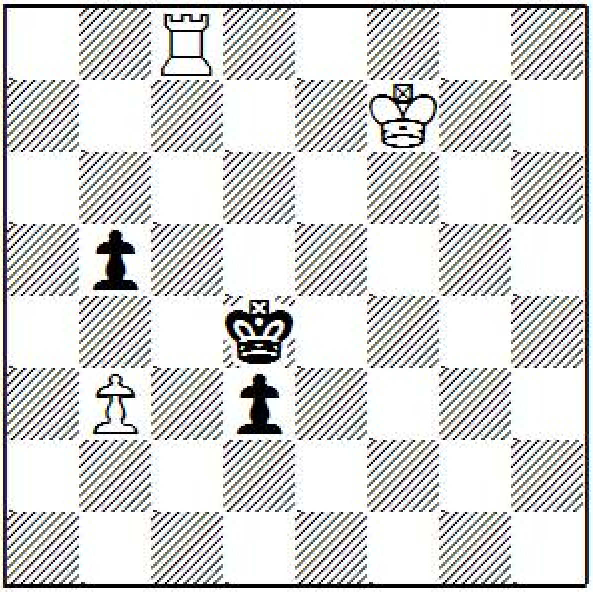


59 ... b4?

The question mark is mine: by occupying the b4-square with his pawn, Rubinstein deprives himself of any counterplay! True, in the opinion of Levenfish and Smyslov, ‘Black no longer has any useful moves: if 59 ... d4, then 60 Ke4 wins. This, according to Averbakh, would merely have ‘complicated the play somewhat, for example: 60 ... Rd6 (if instead 60 ... Kc4 then 61 Ke5 Rf8 62 Rxd4+ Kb3 63 f6 wins) 61 Rf3 Kc4 62 b3+ (*? – G. K.*) 62 ... Kb4 63 Rd3 (63 f6? d3) 63 ... Kc5 64 Ke5 Rd8 65 f6 Re8+ 66 Kf5 Kd5 (66 ... Re3? 67 Rxe3 dxe3 68 f7 and wins) 67 f7 Rf8 68 Kf6 Ke4 69 Rd1 d3 70 Ke7 Rh8 71 f8Q Rxf8 72 Kxf8 Ke3 (*? – G. K.*) 73 Ke7 d2 74 Kd6 and wins.’

But, surprising though it may seem, after 72 ... Kd4! 73 Ke7 Kc3 74 Kd6 Kxb3 75 Rxd3+ Kc4 the position is a draw!

Then I tried 69 Rg3!? (instead of 69 Rd1) 69 ... d3 70 Rg8 Rxf7+ 71 Kxf7 Kd4 72 Rc8!



Analysis diagram

72 ... b4!! (the only move; if 72 ... d2? White wins by the study-like 73 b4!! d1Q 74 Rd8+ Kc3 75 Rxd1 Kxb4 76 Ke6 Kc3 77 Rc1+!! – also the only move, gaining a decisive tempo! – 77 ... Kd3 78 Rb1 Kc4 79 Ke5 b4 80 Ke4 b3 81 Rc1+), and although through inertia the computer shows a win for White, nothing works for him: after 73 Rc4+ Ke3 74 Rc7 Black is again saved by the only move 74 ... Kd4! (backwards!), and if 73 Kf6, then 73 ... d2 74 Kf5 d1Q 75 Rd8+ Kc3 76 Rxd1 Kxb3. A little study!

In addition, it transpires that after 62 b3+? the reply 62 ... Kc5!? (apart from 62 ... Kb4) is also acceptable. Here too no win is apparent: 63 f6 d3 64 f7 d2 65 Rf1 Rd8 66 Ke3 Kb4. At this point I became excited: does 59 ... d4! really save Black?!

But no – the 'iron friend' quickly put everything in its place: 62 f6! (this does indeed win) 62 ... Re6+ (the best defence: 62 ... d3 63 f7 d2 64 f8Q d1Q 65 Qc8+, or 63 ... Rd4+ 64 Ke3 d2 65 f8Q d1Q 66 Qc8+ Kb3 67 Qc3+) 63 Kf5 Re3 (63 ... Re8 64 f7 Rf8 65 b3+ Kd5 66 Kg6 wins) 64 Rf4! (an important tempo: the rook firmly restrains the d-pawn) 64 ... Re8 65 f7 Rf8 66 Ke6 b4 67 Ke7 Rh8 68 f8Q Rxf8 69 Kxf8 Kd3 70 Ke7 b3 71 Kd6 Kc2 72 Kc5 (just in time) 72 ... d3 73 Kc4 d2 74 Rf2 and White wins.

Some interesting discoveries, wouldn't you agree? ... But the game, after 59 ... b4?, concluded much more prosaically:

60 b3 Rf7

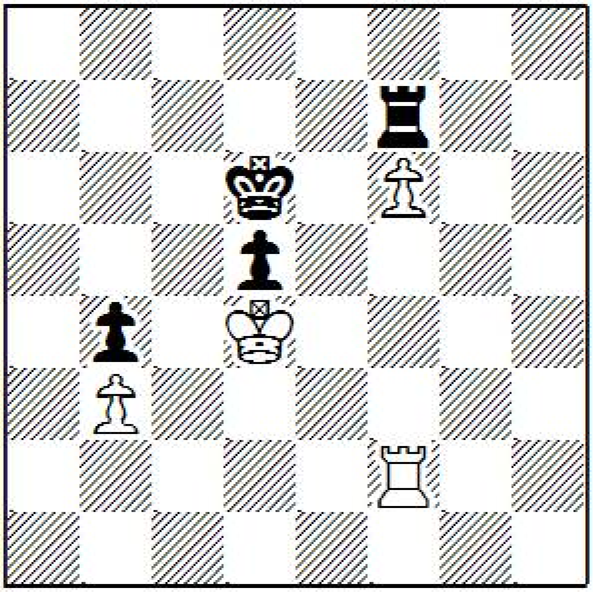
‘Black is in zugzwang: 60 ... Kc6 61 Kd4 Kd6 62 Rf2 would have led to roughly the same continuation as in the game.’ (Averbakh) Even so, this should have been tried, because the winning variation is not so simple: 62 ... Rh6 63 f6 Rh4+ 64 Ke3 Rh3+ 65 Kf4 Ke6 (65 ... Rh8 66 Kg5 d4 67 Kg6 Kd5 68 f7 Rf8 69 Kg7 Rxf7+ 70 Rxf7 d3 71 Rd7+ or 65 ... Rxb3 66 Kg4!, and White manages to win: 66 ... Rc3 67 f7 Rc8 68 f8Q+ Rxf8 69 Rxf8 Kc5 70 Kf3) 66 f7! Rh8 67 Kg5 Rf8 68 Kg6 d4 69 Kg7, winning by one tempo.

61 f6

‘This is the tragedy of Black’s rook position. The passed pawn uses each of its moves to suffocate the defender.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)

61 ... Kd6 62 Kd4 Ke6 63 Rf2! Kd6

63 ... Rxf6? is not possible – the pawn endgame is clearly lost.



64 Ra2!

The key and far from obvious manoeuvre, underestimated beforehand by Rubinstein. ‘All this is rather simple and at the same time instructive. Black has stopped the pawn’s advance, but now he is helpless against the attack by the rook from the flank. White is threatening to exchange rooks.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)

64 ... Rc7 (or 64 ... Rxf6 65 Ra6+, Rxf6 and Kxd5; 64 ... Rb7 65 Ra6+ Kd7 66 Kxd5) **65 Ra6+ Kd7 66 Rb6!** (but not 66 Kxd5? Rc3) **1-0**

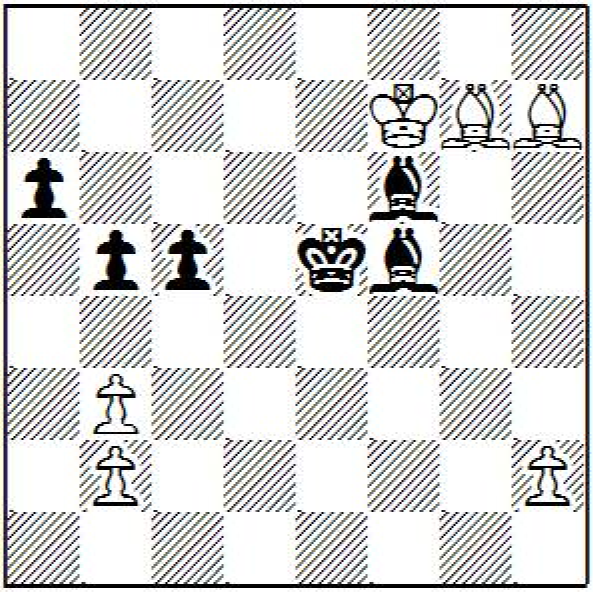
Black resigned due to 66 ... Rc3 67 Rxb4 Rf3 68 Ke5 Rf1 69 Rf4.

Considerable difficulties in qualifying for the final stage of the tournament were also experienced by Lasker, when in the eighth round he lost surprisingly to Bernstein, and then only just escaped against his ‘old friend’ Tarrasch.

Game 67

Em.Lasker-S.Tarrasch

St Petersburg 1914, preliminary tournament



37 ... Bxg7?

The simple 37 ... Be6+! 38 Kf8 Bxg7+ 39 Kxg7 Bxb3 would have won.

38 Bxf5! Kxf5?!

Had Black noticed his oversight, he would have replied 38 ... Bf6 or 38 ... Bh8. But apparently Tarrasch had decided to return an old debt – for Hastings 1895 (cf. *Game No.39*).

39 Kxg7 a5 40 h4! Kg4 41 Kg6!

Excellent: it turns out that this pawn endgame is drawn! Black had only reckoned on 41 Kf6? c4 42 bxc4 bxc4 43 Ke5 c3 44 bxc3 a4 45 Kd4 a3 winning.

41 ... Kxh4 42 Kf5 (the king catches the passed a-pawn) **42 ... Kg3 43 Ke4 Kf2 44 Kd5 Ke3 45 Kxc5 Kd3 46 Kxb5 Kc2 47 Kxa5 Kxb3 ½-½**

An ending that became a thematic predecessor of Réti’s famous study (1921).

This was an important episode: this missed win at the finish of the preliminary stage dispirited Tarrasch, and in the final he was no longer the same player, while on the other hand, because of the system of counting, the half point saved by Lasker, as it later transpired, deprived Capablanca of at least a share of first place!

In the ‘tournament of eleven’ the Cuban was merciless: 1. Capablanca – 8 out of 10; 2-3. Lasker and Tarrasch – 6½; 4-5. Alekhine and Marshall – 6; 6-7. Bernstein and Rubinstein – 5 etc. It seemed that the destiny of first place was decided ... . In the second round of the final tournament Lasker as Black gained a very difficult 100-move draw with Capablanca (with rook against bishop and knight with f-, g- and h-pawns), and then he began performing miracles. First he gained three wins in succession, reducing the deficit to a point.

Now much, if not everything, was decided by the duel of the leaders in the second cycle. This game with Capablanca is one of the most famous in Lasker’s career. For the umpteenth time he demonstrated his true champion’s character, when in an extreme situation he needed to mobilise himself fully and win ‘to order’, and, moreover against a very strong, hard-to-beat opponent (before this game Capa had not lost any games!).

Game 68

Em.Lasker-J.R.Capablanca

St Petersburg 1914, final tournament

Ruy Lopez C68

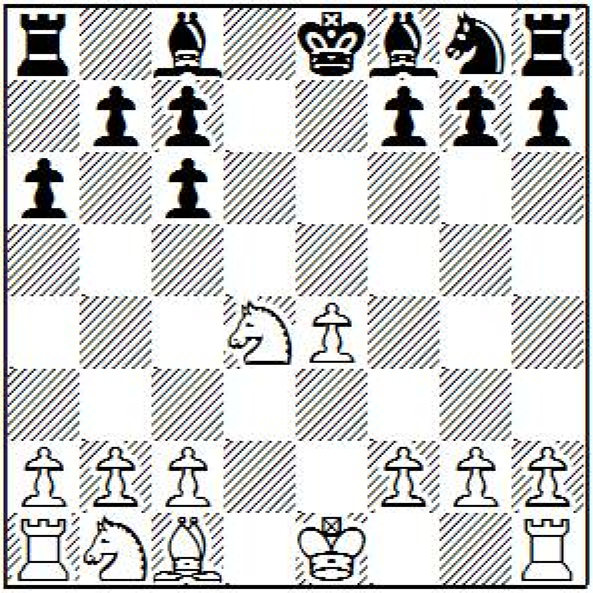
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6!?

A surprising choice: although in Lasker’s hands the Exchange Variation was a formidable weapon (he defeated Steinitz, Chigorin, Tarrasch, Janowski etc. with it), few could have thought that it would work against Capablanca, whose virtuoso endgame technique was already widely known. This especially could not have been imagined by José Raúl himself, with his charming youthful self-confidence – and hence also his underestimation of the opponent's plan.

4 ... dxc6 5 d4

Nowadays, following the example of Fischer, 5 0-0 is considered best, but at that time they more often played 5 Nc3 f6 (5 ... Bc5?! – *Game No.84*) 6 d4 exd4 7 Qxd4 Qxd4 8 Nxd4. It is amusing that this occurred in a game from the previous round, Alekhine-Lasker, and after 8 ... Bd6 9 Be3 Ne7 10 0-0-0 0-0 11 Nb3 Ng6 12 Bc5 Bf4+ 13 Kb1 Re8 14 Rhe1 (14 f3 b6 is equal) 14 ... b6 15 Be3 Be5 16 Bd4 Nh4 (dangerous is 16 ... Bxh2?! 17 g3 Bg4 18 Rc1! etc.) 17 Rg1 Be6 18 f4 Bd6 19 Bf2 Ng6 20 f5 Bxb3 21 axb3 Nf8 White finally lost due to a blunder on the 41st move.

6 ... exd4 6 Qxd4 Qxd4 7 Nxd4



Is it really possible, after removing the queens from the board, to win a decisive game against Capablanca? After all, 'the defects of Black's pawn formation are more than compensated by his good development and the advantage of the two bishops.' (Zak) But, as it turns out, it is possible to win. True, for this you have to be a Lasker ...

7 ... Bd6 (simpler is 7 ... Bd7! and ... 0-0-0 with a very comfortable game) **8 Nc3 Ne7 9 0-0**

9 Be3 also promises little.

9 ... 0-0 10 f4 Re8

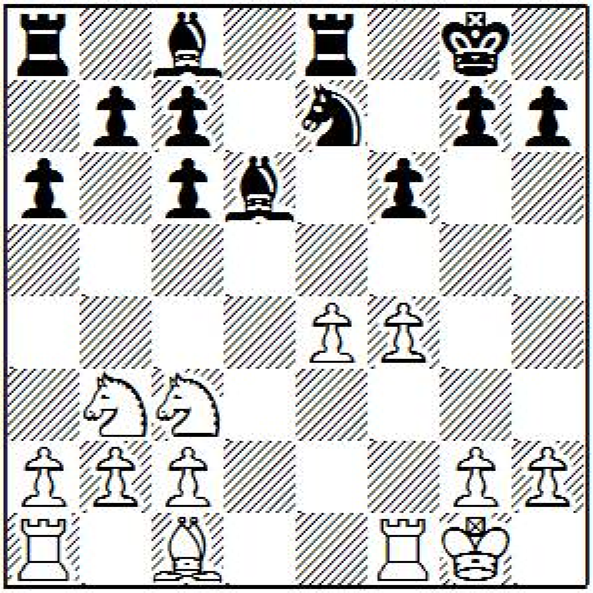
‘Best. It threatens 11 ... Bc5 12 Be3 Nd5. It also prevents 11 Be3 because of 11 ... Nd5 or 11 ... Nf5.’ (Capablanca)

10 ... Bc5!? 11 Be3 Re8 is also possible, as well as Tarrasch’s suggestion 10 ... f5!? 11 e5 Bc5 12 Be3 Bxd4 (but not 12 ... Nd5? 13 Nxd5 Bxd4? 14 Ne7+ Kf7 15 Bxd4 Kxe7 16 Bc5+ or 13 ... cxd5 14 Nxf5) 13 Bxd4 b6 or 13 ... Nd5 with sufficient defensive resources, despite White’s strong passed pawn.

The impression made by Lasker’s original plan was so great, that the commentators tried to improve Black’s play at the very start of the game! But Capablanca is correct in his assessment: Black does not have so many problems that he need be concerned about anything.

11 Nb3 (pointless is 11 e5?! Bc5 12 Be3 Nd5 13 Nxd5 cxd5) **11 ... f6**

‘Preparatory to ... b7-b6 followed by ... c6-c5 and ... Bb7 in conjunction with ... Ng6, which would put White in great difficulties to meet the combined attack against the two centre pawns.’ (Capablanca)



12 f5!

‘It has been wrongly claimed that this wins the game, but I would like nothing better than to have such a position again.’ (Capablanca) According to the classical laws of the Steinitz theory, this is indeed a dubious venture: White devalues his pawn majority on the kingside, giving himself a weak, backward pawn on e4, whereas Black is presented with a powerful outpost at e5. Aren’t these rather too many defects for one move?! But Lasker’s eagle eye is trained on the e6-square ...

12 ... b6

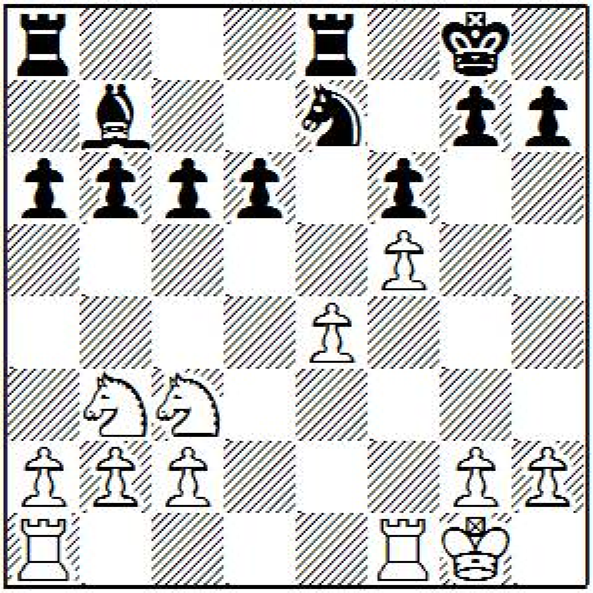
Tarrasch and Réti recommended 12 ... Bd7 13 Bf4 Bxf4 14 Rxf4 Rad8 with the idea of ... Nc8-d6, but the bishop is more active on b7, from where it attacks the e4-pawn.

13 Bf4 Bb7?!

A fundamental mistake: in general it is advantageous for Black to undouble his pawns, but in the given instance the d6-pawn will become a chronic weakness.

Therefore more logical is 13 ... Bxf4! 14 Rxf4 c5 15 Rd1 Bb7 16 Rf2 (16 Rd7 Rac8 and ... Bc6 or ... Nc6-e5) 16 ... Rad8 (16 ... Rac8!? and ... Nc6-e5 is equal – Nimzowitsch) 17 Rxd8 (if 17 Rfd2 Rxd2 18 Rxd2, both 18 ... Bc6 and ... Nc8-d6, and 18 ... Nc6 19 Rd7 Rc8 and ... Ne5! are good) 17 ... Rxd8 18 Rd2 Rxd2 19 Nxd2 Nc6!, and ‘If White answers 20 Nd5 then 20 ... Nd4 for Black will at least draw.’ (Capablanca) This is also confirmed by the computer: 21 Nxc7 Nxc2 22 Nc4 Bxe4 23 Nxb6 Nb4 24 a3 Nd3 25 Nc4 (or 25 Nxa6 Bb7 26 Nc7 Nxb2) 25 ... Bxf5 26 Nxa6 Be6 27 b3 Kf8 with equality.

14 Bxd6 cxd6



15 Nd4

Capablanca admitted that he did not see this move when he played 13 ... Bb7.

15 ... Rad8?!

Black still does not take his opponent’s plan seriously and does not realise his mistake – and yet the knight at e6 will be like a bone in his throat! If he is going to allow it into his position, then better is 15 ... c5 16 Ne6 Rac8 17 Rad1 Rc6 18 Ne2 (or 18 Nd5 Nxd5 19 exd5 Rcc8) 18 ... Bc8 19 N2f4 g5! 20 Nd5 Kf7 with trench warfare.

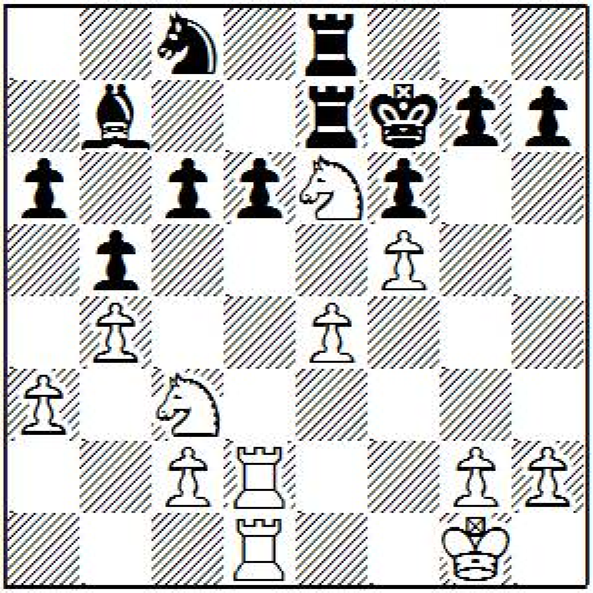
But the most radical way of fighting for equality was 15 ... Bc8! 16 Rad1 c5, for example: 17 Ne6 Bxe6 18 fxe6 Rad8 19 Nd5 Nc6! (but not 19 ... Nc8? 20 e7! Rd7 21 Rxf6! gxf6 22 Nxf6+ Kf7 23 Nxd7 Kxe7 24 Nb8), or 17 Nde2 d5! 18 Nxd5 (18 exd5 Nxf5) 18 ... Nxd5 19 Rxd5 Bb7 20 Rd6 Bxe4 21 Rxb6 Bxc2 with equal chances.

16 Ne6 Rd7 17 Rad1 Nc8

‘I was now on the point of playing ... c6-c5, to be followed by ... d6-d5, but suddenly I became ambitious ... ’ (Capablanca) And indeed, after 17 ... c5 18 Rf2 or 18 g4 there is 18 ... d5! But 18 Nd5! is stronger – although after 18 ... Bxd5 19 exd5 b5, in the opinion of the third world champion, ‘Black has nothing to fear. Black’s plan in this case would be to work his knight around to e5, via c8, b6 and c4 or d7’, White nevertheless retains the initiative: 20 g4 Nc8 21 Rf3 Nb6 22 Rg3 Kh8 23 Kh1 followed by h2-h4 and g4-g5.

18 Rf2 b5 19 Rfd2 Rde7 20 b4 Kf7 21 a3

White now has serious pressure.



21 ... Ba8?

‘Once more changing my plan and this time without any good reason. Had I now played 21 ... Rxe6 22 fxe6 Rxe6, as I intended to do when I went back with the knight to c8, I doubt very much if White would have been able to win the game. At least it would have been extremely difficult.’ (Capablanca)

The exchange sacrifice would certainly have given better practical chances of saving the game, but the question mark is merited not so much by the bishop move itself, but rather Black’s fatal idea of opening the a-file: effective use of it can be made only by a white rook ...

22 Kf2 Ra7 23 g4! h6 24 Rd3 a5? 25 h4 axb4 26 axb4 Rae7?!

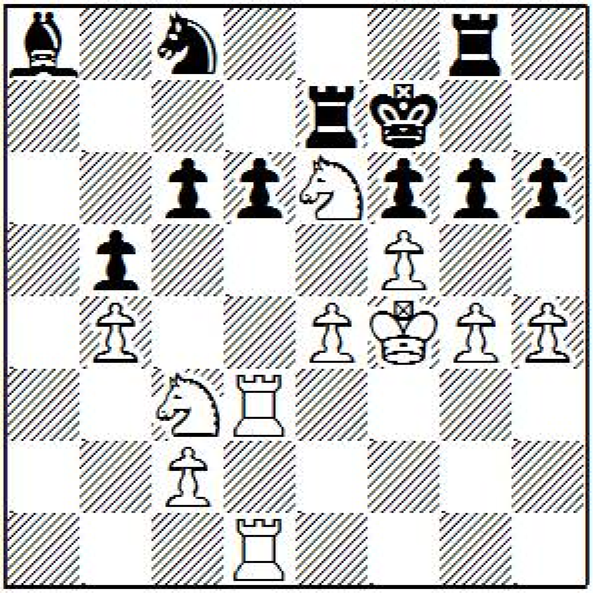
Although Black’s position is difficult, he should not have moved his rook off the newly-opened a-file.

27 Kf3 (the immediate 27 Rg3! was more energetic) **27 ... Rg8 28 Kf4**

Also a non-essential move before the time control.

28 ... g6?!

28 ... g5+ was more tenacious (Capablanca), when there would have followed 29 Kf3 with a possible Rh1, Rdd1-a1, hxg5 etc.



29 Rg3

'White's advantage is already so great, that the immediate breakthrough 29 g5!? hxg5+ 30 hxg5 would also have been decisive, for example: 30 ... gxf5 31 exf5 fxg5+ 32 Nxg5+ Kf8 33 Ne6+ Kf7 34 Ne4, or 30 ... Rh8 31 gxf6 Kxf6 32 Rxd6! Rh4+ (even worse is 32 ... Nxd6 33 e5+ Kf7 34 exd6) 33 Kg3 Nxd6 34 Kxh4 gxf5 35 Rxd6 Rxe6 36 Rd8 fxe4 (the last chance; 36 ... Bb7 37 Rf8+) 37 Rxa8 e3 38 Ra1!, and it only remains to overcome certain technical difficulties. 38 ... Ke5 39 Ne2 Kd5 40 Rd1+ Kc4? 41 Rd4 mate would be an amusing finish.' (Zak)

29 ... g5+

Here it is already hard to offer any good advice. Some criticised Capablanca for this move, recommending 29 ... gxf5, but this too would not have helped in view of 30 exf5! d5 31 g5 Nd6 (or 31 ... hxg5+ 32 hxg5 fxg5+ 33 Nxg5+ Kf8 34 f6 Ra7 35 Ke5!) 32 g6+ Ke8 33 Ra1, and the win for White is not far off.

30 Kf3 Nb6 (a desperate attempt to leap with the knight to c4 and e5) **31 hxg5!**

White is not distracted by 31 Rxd6.

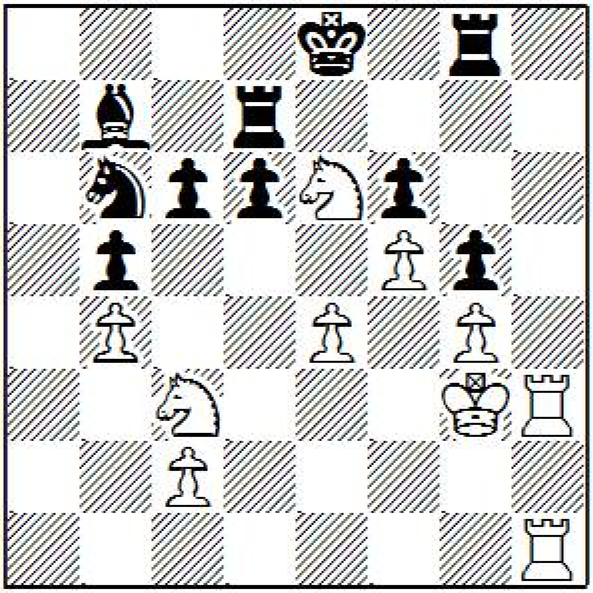
31 ... hxg5 32 Rh3!

Lasker carries out his plan without any deviations. The ‘greedy’ 32 Rxd6? would have given Black the desired respite: 32 ... Nc4 33 Rd8 (33 Rd1 Rh8) 33 ... Rxd8 34 Nxd8+ Ke8 35 Ne6 Rh7!

32 ... Rd7

After 32 ... Nc4? the combined invasion of the white rooks on the a- and h-files is decisive: 33 Rh7+ (33 Ra1 is also possible) 33 ... Ke8 34 Ra1! Bb7 35 Nc7+ Kd7 36 Rxe7+ Kxe7 37 Ra7, and after the bishop moves – 38 N7d5+ and 39 Nxf6 (Réti).

33 Kg3! (the final preparations for the victorious breakthrough) **33 ... Ke8 34 Rdh1 Bb7**



35 e5!!

Over the course of 23 moves (after 12 f5) Black has been unable to neutralise this backward pawn!

35 ... dxe5 (or 35 ... fxe5 36 Ne4) **36 Ne4 Nd5 37 N6c5!**

White would also have won easily by 37 Rh8!? Rxh8 38 Rxh8+ Kf7 39 N4c5 Re7? 40 Rf8 mate.

37 ... Bc8 (37 ... Rc7 38 Nd6+) **38 Nxd7 Bxd7 39 Rh7 Rf8 40 Ra1!**

Black pays dearly for this mistake on the 24th move.

40 ... Kd8 41 Ra8+ Bc8 42 Nc5 1-0

‘Capablanca was dejected. Normally dignified, calm and smiling, on this occasion, for two or three minutes after resigning, he sat at the board with his head in his hands.’ (Romanovsky)

The psychological effect of this brilliant win was enormous. Even seven years later in their match for the world crown, in reply to 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Capa did not once play 3 ... a6! against Lasker. And in St Petersburg he was so shocked, that the following day he ‘collapsed’ with White in his game with Tarrasch and as a result finished half a point behind Lasker.

However, in order to take clear first place, the champion still had to win ‘to order’ in his final game. His bold combination against Marshall has provoked numerous debates.

Game 69

Em.Lasker-F.Marshall

St Petersburg 1914, final tournament

Petroff Defence C42

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nxe5 d6 4 Nf3 Nxe4 5 Qe2

This is what Lasker began playing after his painful defeat at the hands of Pillsbury in St Petersburg 1895/96 (*Game No.40*).

5 ... Qe7 6 d3 Nf6 7 Bg5

Or 7 Nc3 Qxe2+ 8 Bxe2 g6 (8 ... Be7; 8 ... c6 and ... Na6) 9 Nd4 a6 (9 ... Bg7 10 Ndb5) 10 h3 (10 Bg5!?) 10 ... Bg7 11 g4 Bd7! 12 Bf3 Nc6 with an equal position (Shirov-Kramnik, Cazorla 8th matchgame 1998).

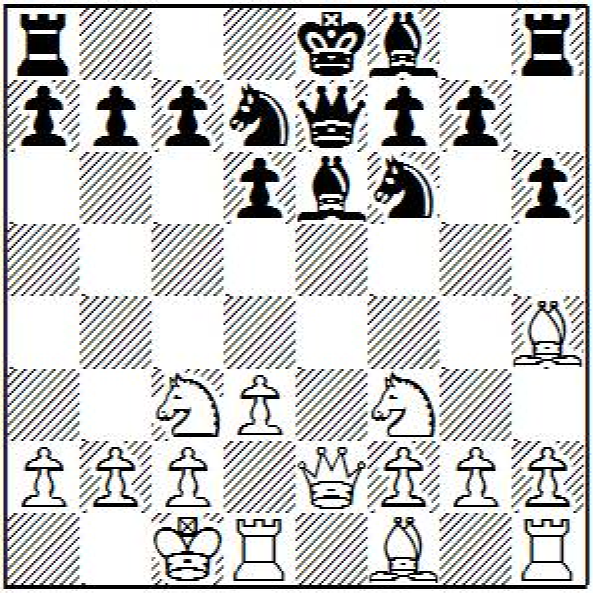
7 ... Be6

Marshall’s favourite move. In the second half of the 20th century they began to prefer 7 ... Nbd7 8 Nc3 Qxe2+ 9 Bxe2 h6 (Bronstein), and then 7 ... Qxe2+ 8 Bxe2 Be7 9 Nc3 c6! (but not 9 ... Bd7 10 0-0-0 Lasker-Teichmann, Cambridge Springs 1904) 10 0-0-0 Na6, as in the 13th and 15th games of the Spassky-Petrosian match (Moscow 1969).

8 Nc3 Nbd7

After 8 ... Nc6?!, apart from 9 0-0-0 0-0-0 10 d4 d5 11 Ne5 with some advantage (Lasker-Pillsbury, St Petersburg 1895/96), it is possible simply to spoil the black pawns – 9 Ne4!? d5 10 Nxf6+ gxf6 11 Be3 0-0-0 12 d4 etc. And if 8 ... h6 it makes sense to play 9 Bxf6 Qxf6 10 d4 – a variation, known from the games Morphy-Löwenthal (New Orleans 1850), Capablanca-Marshall (St Petersburg 1914) and Mieses-Marshall (Baden-Baden 1925).

9 0-0-0 h6 10 Bh4



10 ... g5

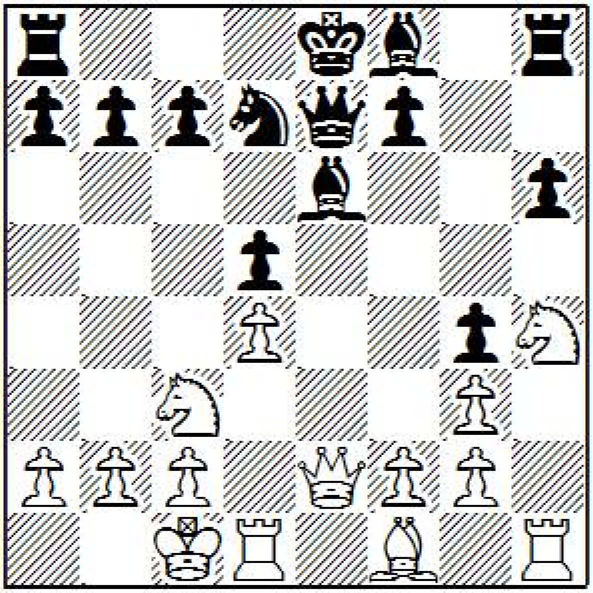
Or 10 ... 0-0-0!? 11 d4 Nb6 12 Qb5 a6 13 Qa5 with a slight advantage to White.

11 Bg3 Nh5 (dangerous is 11 ... Bg7 12 Nd4 0-0?! 13 h4!) **12 d4 Nxg3** (12 ... 0-0-0!?) **13 hxg3 g4?!**

13 ... 0–0–0 is better, but Tarrasch's recommendation of 13 ... Nb6 14 d5 Bg4? is strongly met by 15 Qb5+! Bd7 (15 ... Qd7 16 Re1+) 16 Qa5.

14 Nh4 d5

Alas, 14 ... 0-0-0? is not possible because of 15 d5.



For complete happiness Black is short of just one tempo: had he already castled queenside, his two bishops could have caused White considerable problems, especially with the crippled knight on h4. Fully aware of this, the world champion launches an offensive.

15 Qb5!

‘A move, with which Lasker wins not only the game, but also the tournament in St Petersburg.’ (Tarrasch) Much less was promised by 15 Nb5 Kd8 16 Qd2 a6 17 Nc3 Bg7.

15 ... 0-0-0

A cunning trap very much in Marshall’s style! However, 15 ... Qb4? 16 Nxd5! was clearly bad, and 15 ... Bg7?! 16 Qxb7 0-0 17 Nxd5 was extremely dubious.

16 Qa5! (after 16 Nxd5? Bxd5 17 Qxd5 Qg5+ 18 Qxg5 hxg5 White would have lost his wretched knight) **16 ... a6**

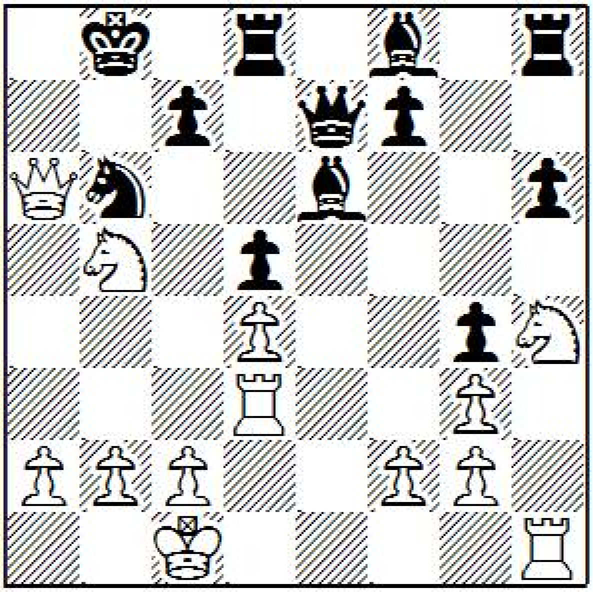
But not 16 ... Kb8? 17 Nb5.

17 Bxa6! bxa6?!

Not at all to Marshall’s liking was the depressing endgame a pawn down after 17 ... Qb4!? 18 Qxb4 Bxb4 19 Bd3 Bxc3 20 bxc3, although this was probably the best saving chance.

18 Qxa6+ Kb8 19 Nb5 Nb6 (19 ... Nf6? 20 Rd3 wins) **20 Rd3**

The critical position for assessing the correctness of Lasker’s combination.



20 ... Qg5+

Several commentators considered this to be the decisive mistake, and suggested instead the immediate 20 ... Nc4, so as not to allow the rook to go to b3: 21 Rb3 Qg5+ 22 Kb1 Nd2+ and ... Nxb3+.

And if 21 Re1, then 21 ... Rd6 22 Nxd6 Qxd6 23 Rb3+ (23 Qb5+ Qb6) 23 ... Nb6 24 a4 Bc8 25 Re8 Qd7 with drawing chances (although here, in my opinion, 22 Qa7+ Kc8 23 Nf5! is more promising, e.g. 23 ... Qg5+ 24 Kb1 Rc6 25 Qa8+ Kd7 26 Na7).

However, a more careful study of the position, even without the help of a computer, reveals that 20 ... Nc4 also does not refute the champion’s idea. After 21 Rb3! (nevertheless!) 21 ... Qg5+ White has two tempting continuations:

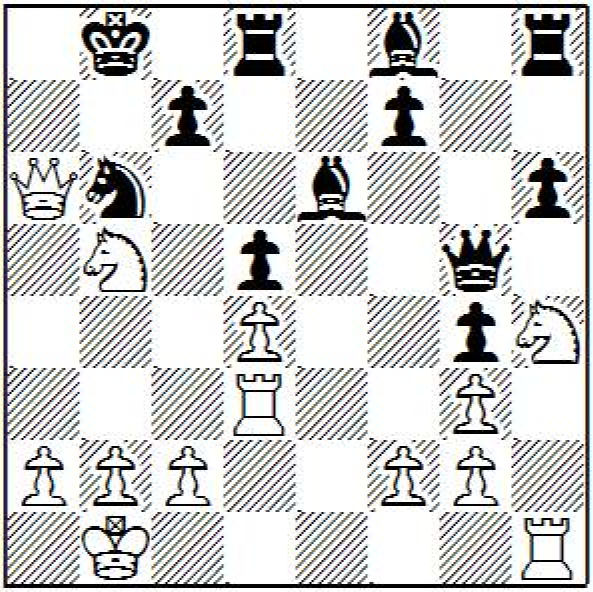
1) 22 f4!? gxf3+ 23 Kb1 Nd2+ 24 Ka1 Nxb3+ 25 cxb3 Qxg3 26 Nxf3 Bd6 27 Rc1 Bf4 28 Ne5! Bxe5 29 Qa7+! (29 dxe5? Qe3) 29 ... Kc8 30 dxe5 Kd7 31 Nxc7! Qh4 32 Nxd5+ Ke8 33 Nc7+ Kd7 (33 ... Kf8 34 Nxe6+ fxe6 35 Rf1+ and mate) 34 Qc5! with decisive threats;

2) 22 Kb1 Nd2+ 23 Ka1 Nxb3+ 24 cxb3 Bd6 25 Qa7+ Kc8 26 Nxd6+ Rxd6 (if 26 ... cxd6, then 27 f4! gxf3 28 Nxf3 Qe3 29 Re1!) 27 Qa8+ Kd7

28 Qxh8 with an obvious advantage (28 ... Rc6 29 a3 Rc2 30 f4 gxf3 31 Nxf3 Qxg3 32 Qf8 wins).

Therefore the correctness of Lasker's famous combination remains above suspicion. Marshall probably avoided 20 ... Nc4 because he intuitively sensed the danger of this move.

21 Kb1



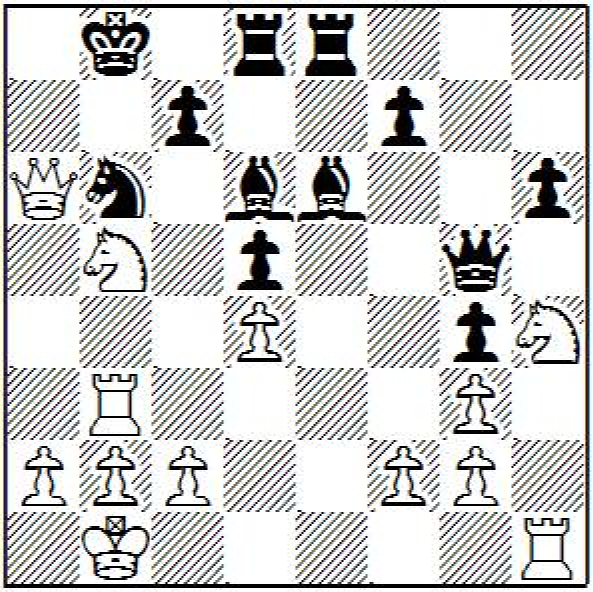
21 ... Bd6

Also after 21 ... Qe7 22 Qa7+ (22 Rb3!? Rd6 23 a4) 22 ... Kc8 23 Rc3 Nc4 24 Nf5! Bxf5 25 Qa8+ Kd7 26 Qxd5+ Ke8 (26 ... Kc8?! 27 Na7+ Kb8 28 Nc6+) 27 Qxf5 or 27 Qc6+ Qd7 (27 ... Rd7 28 Nxc7+ Kd8 29 Qa8+ and Rxc4+) 28 Nxc7+ Ke7 29 Re1+ Be6 30 Qxc4 White has an irresistible attack.

22 Rb3

White could also have considered 22 Rc3!? Nc4 (22 ... Nc8 23 Na7!) 23 Qa7+ Kc8 24 Nxd6+ Rxd6 (24 ... cxd6 25 Ka1!! and Rb3) 25 Qa8+ Kd7 26 Qxh8 Rb6 27 f4 winning.

22 ... Rhe8



If 22 ... Qe7 or 22 ... Qf6, then again 23 a4!

23 a4!

Much stronger than 23 Rc3 Nc4 24 Nxd6 Rxd6 (24 ... cxd6?? 25 Rb3+ Kc7 26 Qb7 mate) 25 Qb5+ Rb6 26 Qxe8+ Kb7 27 f4 gxf3 28 Nxf3 Qxg3 with an unclear game.

23 ... Bf5 24 Na7! (24 a5!? Bxc2+ 25 Kxc2 Re2+ 26 Kb1 was also decisive) **24 ... Bd7 25 a5 Qd2 26 axb6 Re1+ 27 Ka2**

Or 27 Rxe1 Qxe1+ 28 Ka2.

27 ... c6 28 Nb5 cxb5 29 Qa7+ 1-0 29 ... Kc8 30 Qa8+ Bb8 31 Qa6 mate. A crushing win!

And so, by demonstrating his outstanding fighting qualities and scoring 7 out of 8 in the final(!), the current champion finished ahead of two future chess kings and two former challengers (1. Lasker – 13½ out of 18; Capablanca – 13; 3. Alekhine – 10; 4. Tarrasch – 8½; 5. Marshall – 8). And he showed that, as a couple of decades earlier, he still had no equals in the world!

An invaluable reward for this victory was the acknowledgement of Dr Tarrasch: ‘Lasker again produced a wonderful game (*the game in question is the one with Marshall from the first cycle – G. K.*). He played ‘not according to the rules’, in ‘ultra-modern’ style, sharply for a win. Lasker took a serious risk! He was in a difficult position. But that is his style. His opponents play objectively correctly and obtain good positions, but, strangely enough, Lasker never loses. No one has the right to reproach him for his skill in playing in this style. We must merely again and again be surprised by him ... For participating in the tournament Lasker received an enormous fee – 4,000 roubles. *I do not find this too high*. Who else could play like this! Patrons do not give their money lightly, and if in future Lasker will play like this, he deserves much greater fees.'

Chess Longevity

Before the start of St Petersburg 1914 Lasker announced in the press that in the autumn he would play 'with the brilliant Russian master Rubinstein a match of 20 games for the world championship.' And at the same time he 'curtailed' another challenger: 'Can the esteemed title of genius be conferred on Capablanca? In my opinion, no.' But after the tournament the Cuban's stock, naturally, rose sharply. Alas, all plans were ruined by the First World War.

Of the rare events of that time I should mention the 'friendly' match that Lasker played with the markedly weaker Tarrasch (Berlin 1916: +5 -0 =1) and the double-cycle match-tournament of four stars, also in Berlin (1918): 1. Lasker – 4½ out of 6; 2. Rubinstein – 4 (both undefeated); 3. Schlechter – 2; 4. Tarrasch – 1½. Two and a half months later Schlechter died prematurely ...

Negotiations with Capablanca were resumed only in 1920. After the difficult war years Lasker felt unprepared for a match with his flourishing opponent, but, having lost, due to inflation, all of his savings, he could not reject the generous offer of the Havana Chess Club – $11,000, an unheard of sum for those times! The result of this match (Havana 1921) is well known: Capablanca won ahead of schedule by the score +4 =10 and became the third world champion in history. However, the battle between the two chess greats did not end there.

Lasker's first appearance after the Havana match created a genuine furore – the ex-champion brilliantly won a strong international tournament in Mährisch-Ostrau (1923), ahead of both his former rivals and the young generation of top-class masters: 1. Lasker – 10½ out of 13 (undefeated); 2. Réti – 9½; 3. Grünfeld – 8½; 4. Selesnieff – 7½; 5-6. Tartakower and Euwe

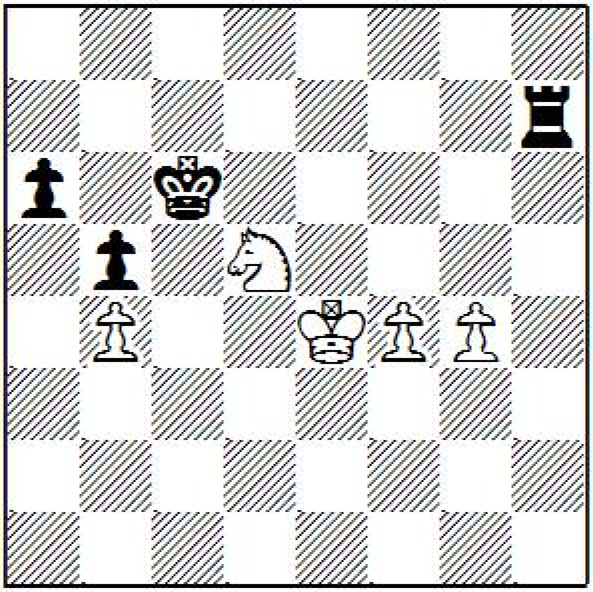
– 7; 7-8. Bogoljubow and Tarrasch – 6½; 9. Spielmann – 6; 10. Rubinstein – 5½ etc.

Then in the double-cycle super-tournament in New York (1924) the 55-year-old former king performed yet another miracle, by finishing ahead of the entire elite, including both the current and the future world champions: 1. Lasker – 16 out of 20(!); 2. Capablanca – 14½; 3. Alekhine – 12; 4. Marshall – 11; 5. Réti – 10½; 6. Maróczy – 10; 7. Bogoljubow – 9½; 8. Tartakower – 8 etc. Moreover, he fought like a lion in every game!

Game 70

Em.Lasker-Ed.Lasker

New York 1924, 6th round



72 ... Rh8?!

‘This plausible move grants White a hidden possibility for a draw. Correct would have been 72 ... Rd7, which could have forced the retreat of the knight without taking the rook from the seventh row; for instance: 73 Ne3 a5 74 bxa5 b4 75 g5 (75 a6 b3 is pointless) 75 ... Kc5 76 Nc2 b3 77 Na3 b2 78 g6 Kb4 79 Nb1 (79 Nc2+ Kb3) 79 ... Rd1 80 g7 Rg1 followed by ... Rxg7 winning, or 73 Nf6 Rd8 74 g5 a5 75 bxa5 b4 76 g6 b3, and wins.' (Alekhine)

Later instead of 76 g6? the 'saving' 76 Ng4 b3 77 Ne5+ Kb5 78 Nd3 Re8+ 79 Kd4 Kxa5 was recommended, but stronger is 78 ... Kc4! 79 Nb2+ Kc3 80 Na4+ Kb4 81 Nb2 Rd2 and wins.

73 Ne3 (inferior is 73 Nf6?! Rd8 74 g5 a5!) **73 ... Re8+ 74 Kd4 Rd8+ 75 Ke4!**

If 75 Kc3, then 75 ... Rd6! is unpleasant.

75 ... a5!

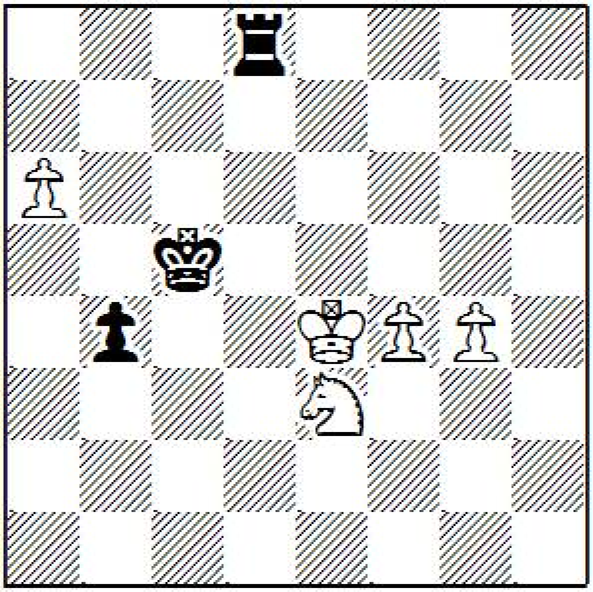
Black's last winning chance is to create his own passed pawn.

76 bxa5 b4 77 a6!

'The only move. Obviously insufficient, for instance, would have been 77 g5 b3 78 Nc4 Kc5 79 Nb2 Rd2 80 Nd3+ Kc4 81 Ne5+ Kc3, and wins. (Alekhine) And the recommendation 77 Nc4 b3 78 Ke3 Kb5 79 Nb2 would have been no good at all on account of 79 ... Kxa5 80 g5 Kb4 81 g6 Kc3 82 Na4+ Kc2 83 f5 Re8+ 84 Kd4 Ra8.

77 ... Kc5!

Inferior was 77 ... b3?! 78 Nc4 Kb5 79 Nb2 Kxa6 (79 ... Rd2 80 a7) 80 Ke3 Kb5 81 g5 Kb4 82 g6 Kc3 (or 82 ... Ka3 83 Nc4+) 83 Na4+ with a draw, since 83 ... Kc2? fails to 84 f5 b2 85 Nxb2 Kxb2 86 g7 and White wins.



78 a7! b3

Alekhine considered this sharp position to be drawn, but for the moment no clear draw for White is apparent! Also good was 78 ... Ra8!? 79 f5 Rxa7 80 Nd1 Re7+ 81 Kf3 Rf7 82 Nb2 Kd5 83 Kf4 b3 etc.

79 Nd1 Ra8! (79 ... Kb6 80 Ke3 Kxa7 81 Nb2 is equal) **80 g5**

White loses after 80 f5?! Rxa7 81 f6 Kd6 82 Kf5 Ra1 83 Nb2 Rf1+ 84 Kg6 Rf2 85 Nd3 b2 86 Nxb2 Rxb2.

80 ... Rxa7 81 g6 Rd7

Many commentators, following Alekhine, ignore this moment, but the computer suggests that after 81 ... Kd6! 82 Kf5 Ke7 83 Kg5 Ra2 things are bad for White.

82 Nb2 Rd2 (82 ... Kd6!? 83 f5 Rc7 84 Kf4 Rc2 is also tempting) **83 Kf3! Rd8**

Of course, not 83 ... Rxb2? 84 g7.

84 Ke4

Possibly better was 84 f5!? Kd6 85 Kf4 Rc8 86 Nd1, although after 86 ... Rc4+ 87 Kg5 Rc1 88 Nb2 Rc2 89 Nd1 Ke5 there is still no obvious draw.

84 ... Rd2?!

It would appear to be only here, and not on the 72nd move, that Black misses a win: 84 ... Kb4 85 f5 Kc3 86 Na4+ Kc2 87 f6 Ra8.

85 Kf3 Rd8 86 Ke4 Kd6 (forcing the win of both passed pawns, but ... not the game!) **87 Kd4!**

Dangerous is 87 f5?! Rc8 88 Nd3 Rc4+.

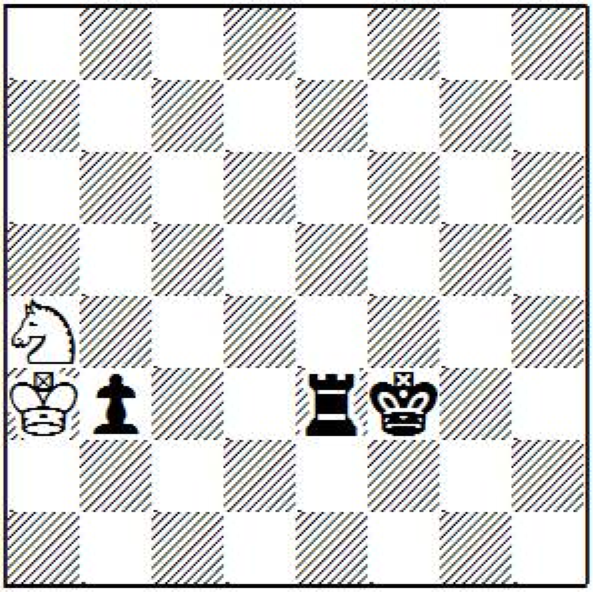
87 ... Rc8 88 g7! (88 f5? Ke7 loses) **88 ... Ke6 89 g8Q+ Rxg8 90 Kc4 Rg3**

Or 90 ... Rb8 91 Kc3 Kf5 92 Nd3 Rb6 93 Nb2 (not 93 Kb2? Ke4) 93 ... Kxf4 94 Na4 Rb8 95 Nb2 with a draw (Shereshevsky).

91 Na4 Kf5 92 Kb4 Kxf4 93 Nb2 Ke4 94 Na4 Kd4 95 Nb2 Rf3

‘An attempt to bring over the king to d2 in the rear of the rook. Meanwhile, however, White had time to post his king on b2 so that further attempts to approach must remain futile. An unusual game rich in vicissitudes.’ (Alekhine)

96 Na4 Re3 97 Nb2 Ke4 98 Na4 Kf3 99 Ka3!



99 ... Ke4

Or 99 ... Ke2 100 Nc5 Kd2 101 Kb2 with a draw.

100 Kb4 Kd4 101 Nb2 Rh3 102 Na4 Kd3 103 Kxb3 Kd4+ ½-½

'This is probably the most incredible, the most paradoxical draw in the history of international tournaments.' (B. Vainstein) When he shook his opponent's hand, the American master exclaimed: 'I didn't know that in the endgame a knight could draw against a rook and a pawn!'

In New York Richard Réti distinguished himself with his famous opening, one of the pillars of the new-fangled stream of chess thinking – hypermodernism (cf. p.275). However, at the very height of the tournament race it met its match: the wise Lasker introduced a sound system of defence which later acquired his name.

Game 71

R.Réti-Em.Lasker

New York 1924, 16th round

Réti Opening A12

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6!? (before this 2 ... e6 was tried against Réti – *Game*

No.98; for 2 ... d4 cf. *Game No.146*) **3 b3**

Avoiding the questionable 3 d4 Nf6 4 Nc3 dxc4 5 e3 b5 6 a4 b4 7 Na2 e6 (Réti-Lasker, Mährisch-Ostrau 1923). This theme was later developed in the game Reshevsky-Smyslov (USSR-USA radio match 1945), which is examined in the second volume.

3 ... Bf5!?

'With this move Dr Lasker as second player applies the London system of development, which, with colours transposed, has several times stood the test against the double fianchetto,' writes Alekhine, having in mind 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 g6 3 Bf4 Bg7 4 h3 (4 Nbd2 c5 5 e3 d6 6 c3 Nc6 7 h3 0-0 8 Bc4 Alekhine-Euwe, London 1922) 4 ... 0-0 5 Nbd2 d6 6 e3 Nbd7 7 c3 c5 8 Bc4 b6 9 0-0 Bb7 10 Qe2 Qc7 11 Bh2 Rae8 12 e4 (Capablanca-Réti, London 1922), or 4 ... c5 5 e3 b6 6 Nbd2 Bb7 7 Bd3 0-0 8 0-0 d6 9 c3 Nbd7 10 Qe2 Rc8 11 a4 (Réti-Alekhine, New York 1924, 13th round).

A modern variation is 3 ... Bg4, which, as it happens, has also been played by me: against Gulko (46th USSR Championship, Tbilisi 1978) and Leko (Wijk aan Zee 2001). In any case, Black's main idea is to develop his c8-bishop outside the pawn chain and only then set up the defensive wall c6-d5-e6.

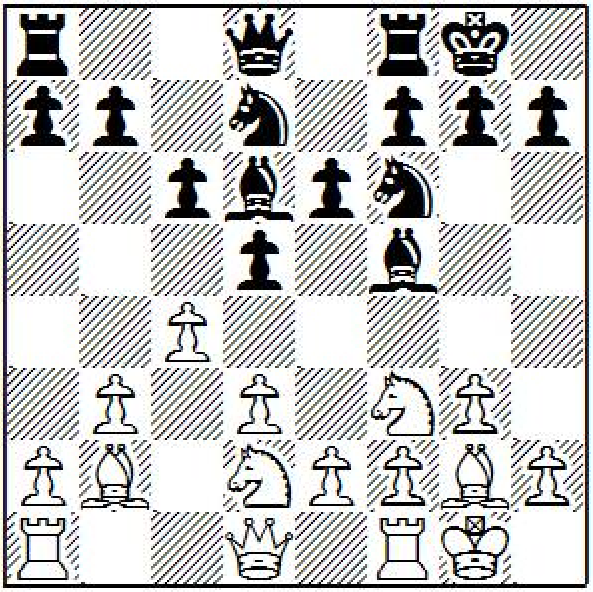
4 g3 Nf6 5 Bg2 Nbd7

'More cautious would have been first 5 ... e6, as White might assure himself of a positional advantage, even if microscopical, by means of 6 cxd5! cxd5 7 Bb2 followed by Nc3 etc. (compare the game Dr Lasker-Alekhine from the 18th round, wherein, with colours transposed, this method was adopted successfully).' (Alekhine)

6 Bb2 e6 7 0-0 Bd6

A good alternative was 7 ... Be7 8 d3 0-0 9 Nbd2 a5!? (managing without 9 ... h6 – *Game No.108*), and if 10 Nh4, then 10 ... Bg4 11 h3 Bh5 12 g4 Bg6 with equality.

8 d3 0-0 9 Nbd2 (9 Nc3 Qe7 equalises)



9 ... e5?!

Rather premature activity. Alekhine attaches an exclamation mark to this move, ignoring the possible reply 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 e4! 9 ... h6 will do, and if 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 e4, then 11 ... dxe4 12 dxe4 Bg4! (but not 12 ... Bxe4? 13 Nxe4 Nxe4 14 Nd4 Ndf6 15 Re1 with a strong initiative for White), but the most logical is 9 ... Qe7! 10 a3 a5 with a normal game.

10 cxd5 cxd5 11 Rc1?!

Only 11 e4! would have given hope of at least some advantage: 11 ... dxe4 12 dxe4 Bxe4?! 13 Nxe4 Nxe4 14 Nh4 Ndf6 15 Re1 Nc5 16 Nf5, or 11 ... Be6 (11 ... Bg4 12 exd5 and Nc4!) 12 exd5 Bxd5 13 Nc4 Qb8 14 Re1 Re8 15 Rc1 etc. But Réti carries out his favourite original plan.

11 ... Qe7 12 Rc2

With the intention of Qa1 and Rfc1. Réti’s recommendation 12 Re1 with the belated idea of e2-e4 is hardly dangerous, although perhaps it would have been rather more solid.

12 ... a5! (Lasker sensed the correct course of play) **13 a4**

White could not allow ... a5-a4, but now his b3-pawn and the b4-square are weak.

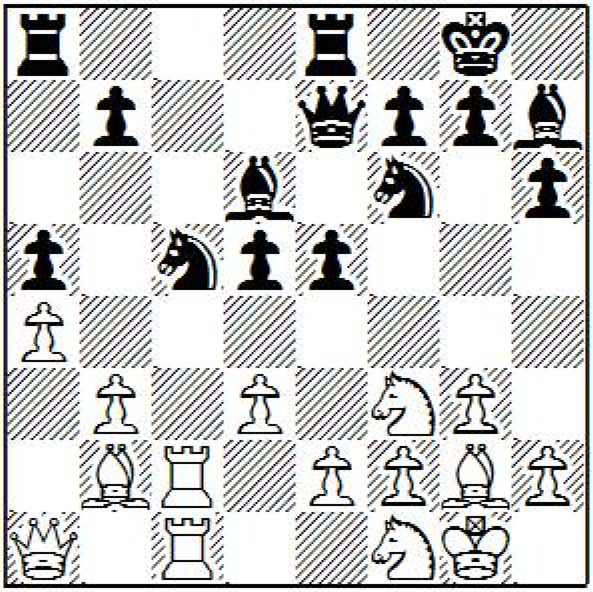
13 ... h6 (in order after ... Rfe8 and ... Bh7 to threaten the breakthrough ... e5-e4-e3) **14 Qa1**

After 14 Nh4?! Bh7 15 e4 Nc5! Black would have seized the initiative.

14 ... Rfe8 15 Rfc1 Bh7 16 Nf1 (in parrying ... e5-e4, White leaves his b3-pawn undefended)

16 ... Nc5!?

If 16 ... e4 17 dxe4, then 17 ... Bxe4 18 Rc3 Rad8 is unclear, while 17 ... dxe4 18 Nd4 e3 19 Nxe3! Bxc2 20 Rxc2 is entirely advantageous to White, who has two strong bishops. But what is he to do now? Imperceptibly Lasker has outplayed his opponent ...



17 Rxc5!?

'With correct position judgement White seeks his salvation in this sacrifice by which he can dispose of one of Black's centre pawns. 17 Qa2, for instance, would have been apparently less profitable on account of 17 ... Na6.' (Alekhine)

17 ... Bxc5 18 Nxe5 Rac8

In my view, a continuation not mentioned by the commentators was more accurate: 18 ... Bd6! 19 f4 Rac8 with hopes of converting the exchange advantage.

19 Ne3 Qe6 20 h3 Bd6?

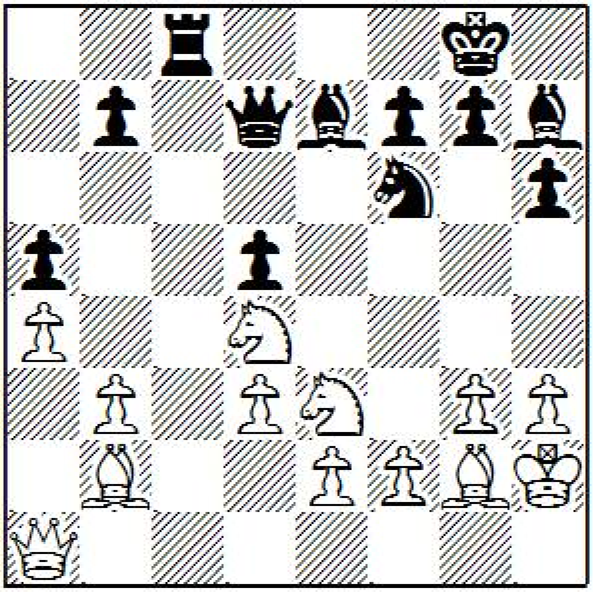
Apparently an oversight. 'A mistake which might have had unpleasant consequences and in place of which might best have been played 20 ... b6 in order to safeguard the queen’s wing as well as the position of the bishop. After 21 d4 he would still have had sufficient counterplay by occupying the square e4, and in the event of other moves a plan leading to simplification could have been undertaken with 21 ... d4 22 Nc4 Nd7 etc., after which his material advantage would finally have been decisive.’ (Alekhine) Also good was the direct 20 ... Bxe3!? 21 fxe3 Qb6 22 Bd4 Qxb3 23 Rb1 Qc2 24 Rxb7 Qxe2.

21 Rxc8 Rxc8 22 Nf3?

‘White is not aware that Dame Fortune smiles at him. By 22 N5g4 Nxg4 23 hxg4 (*or 23 Bxd5!? Qe7 24 Nxg4 – G. K.*) he could have won a second pawn for the exchange and thereby have avoided anyway the danger of loss. After 23 ... Bf8 (23 ... Bxg3 24 Bxg7 etc.) 24 Bxd5 Qd7 25 Bf3 it would have been for Black, possibly through 25 ... b5, to strive for a difficult draw.’ (Alekhine) Or 23 ... Bc5 24 Bxd5 Qd7 25 Bd4 etc.

22 ... Be7 23 Nd4 Qd7 24 Kh2?!

‘The beginning of an artificial manoeuvre, the insufficiency of which is demonstrated by Dr Lasker with marvellous clearness and precision. Better drawing chances were offered by 24 Nb5, which, on account of the threat of Bd4 followed by Nc3 etc., would have forced Black, after ... Bf5-e6, to permit the exchange of that bishop, thereby strengthening the power of the hostile pair of bishops.’ (Alekhine)



24 ... h5! 25 Qh1

‘Even for Réti himself this is almost too “original”. In any event this move would have been ineffective if Black had been merely content to protect his pawn simply by means of 25 ... Rd8. His next move, however, is much more energetic and to the point.’ (Alekhine)

25 ... h4! 26 Nxd5

Alekhine buries White too early, saying that the endgame after 26 Bxd5 Nxd5 27 Qxd5 Qxd5 28 Nxd5 Bc5 is hopeless for him (29 Nb5 Bf5!) – after 29 Ne3! hxg3+ it would have been far from easy to dismantle the unusual knight harness.

26 ... hxg3+ 27 fxg3 Nxd5 28 Bxd5 Bf6! (a terrible pin) **29 Bxb7** (if 29 Qg2 with the idea of 29 ... Rc5 30 e4 there is the reply 29 ... Bxd4 30 Bxd4 Rc2 31 Qf3 Bf5!) **29 ... Rc5**

29 ... Rd8 30 e3 Bxd3 was also possible.

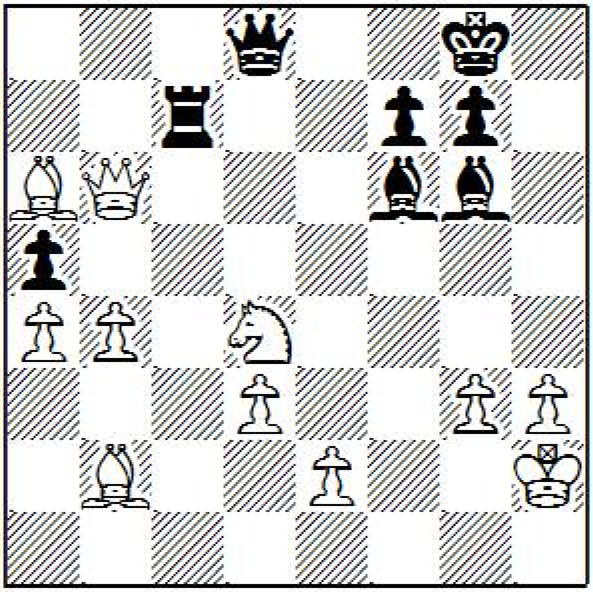
30 Ba6?

The fatal last move before the time control (with the threat of 31 Qa8+). Alekhine attaches an exclamation mark to it, but the cold-hearted Fritz shows that essential was 30 Be4 Bxd4 31 Bxh7+ Kxh7 32 Qe4+ f5 33 Qxd4 Qxd4 34 Bxd4 Rc2 35 Kg2 (inferior is 35 Bb6?! Rxe2+ 36 Kg1 Rb2 37 Bxa5 Rxb3) 35 ... Rxe2+ 36 Kf3 Re8 37 Bc3 Rb8 38 Bxa5 Rxb3 39 Kf4 Rxd3 40 Bb6 with drawing chances.

30 ... Bg6 31 Qb7 Qd8

In my opinion, 31 ... Qd6! would have won more quickly, for example: 32 Ba3 (32 b4? Rg5; nothing is changed by 32 Qa8+ Kh7) 32 ... Bxd4 33 Bxc5 Bxc5 34 Bc4 Qd4!

32 b4 (unsuitable is 32 e3 Bxd4 33 Bxd4 Rc2+ 34 Kh1 Qd6 and wins) **32 ... Rc7 33 Qb6**



33 ... Rd7! 34 Qxd8+ Rxd8 35 e3

The point is that if 35 Nc6? Black has 35 ... Rd6 36 Bxf6 Rxc6 winning.

35 ... axb4 36 Kg2

‘A trifle better would have been 36 Bc4, but even then Black would have won eventually after 36 ... Ra8 37 Bb5 Bf5 followed by the transfer of this bishop to b3.’ (Alekhine)

36 ... Bxd4 37 exd4

‘So, the hypermodern idea of caring for the central pawns has been carried out by Réti consistently and, it can be said, uncompromisingly: the game is lost, but the pawns are still intact! Incidentally, if 37 Bxd4 Black would have won by 37 ... Rxd4 38 exd4 b3 39 Bc4 b2 40 Ba2 Bxd3.’ (B. Vainstein)

However, it was shown by Alekhine that after 41 a5! b1Q 42 Bxb1 Bxb1 43 a6! (but not 43 Kf3? Bd3 44 d5 Kf8 45 Ke3 Bf1 46 Kd4 Ke7 47 Kc5 Kd7 48 h4 f5 49 d6 Bg2 50 a6 g6 and Black wins) 43 ... Be4+ 44 Kf2 f6 45 Ke3 Bd5 46 Kf4 Kf7 47 h4 Kg6 48 g4 Ba8 49 a7 Bb7 50 g5 White gains a draw. And after 37 Bxd4 he recommended the simple 37 ... Bf5! 38 Kf3 (38 Bc4 Be6) 38 ... Bd7 winning.

37 ... Bf5 38 Bb7 Be6! 39 Kf3 (39 a5 Bd5+) **39 ... Bb3 40 Bc6 Rd6 41 Bb5 Rf6+ 42 Ke3 Re6+! 43 Kf4**

Only a little better was 43 Kd2 (43 Kf3 Bd1+) 43 ... Rg6 44 g4 Rh6.

43 ... Re2 44 Bc1 Rc2 45 Be3 Bd5 0-1

After this important win Lasker scored a further 5½ out of 6(!), and Capa was not able to keep pace with him ...

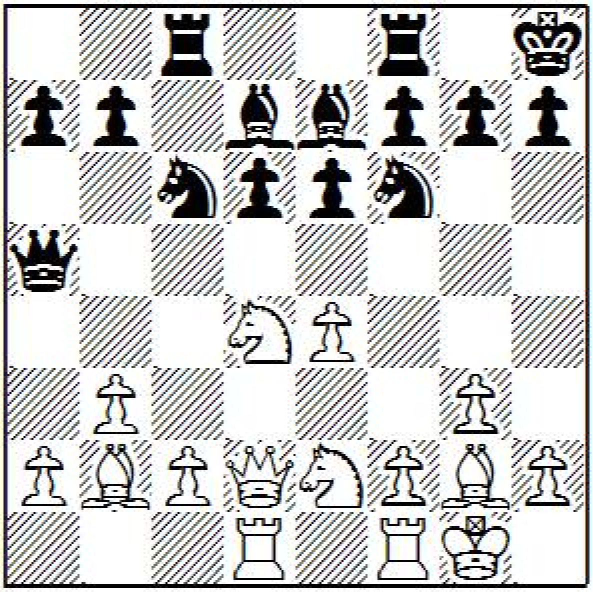
Eighteen months later the ex-champion also came ahead of the 'Cuban Morphy' at the First Moscow International Tournament (1925): 1. Bogoljubow – 15½ out of 20; 2. Lasker 14; 3. Capablanca 13½; 4. Marshall – 12½; 5-6. Tartakower and Torre – 12; 7-8. Réti and Romanovsky 11½; 9-10. Grünfeld and Ilyin-Genevsky – 10½; 11. Bohatirchuk – 10; 12-14. Verlinsky, Rubinstein and Spielmann – 9½; 15. Levenfish – 9 etc. Not only the third, but also the second chess king delighted the many thousands of spectators with their play, assisting the famous 'chess fever'.

In the following game he was once more ahead of his time. Then his queen sacrifice was a revelation – whereas now it is a typical procedure and no longer really a sacrifice, but simply a form of exchange.

Game 72

A.Ilyin-Genevsky-Em.Lasker

Moscow 1925

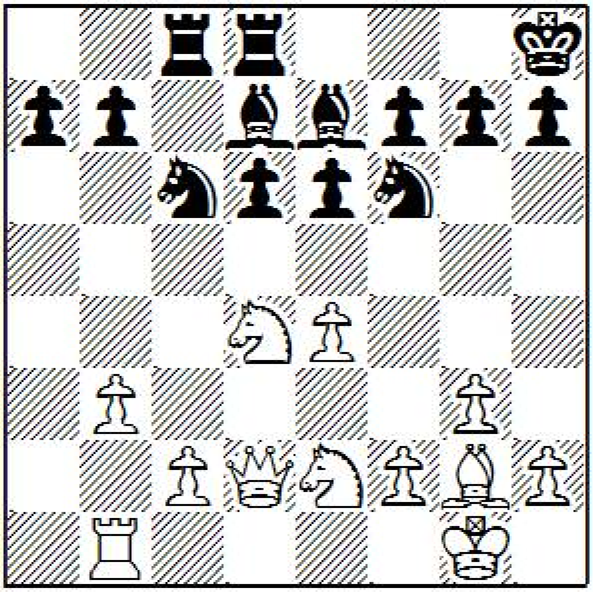


White has just played 13 Nce2!, inviting 13 ... Qxd2 14 Rxd2 followed by Rfd1 and c2-c4 with a more than comfortable game ...

13 ... Qxa2!!

‘Here the thought probably occurred to Lasker: if yesterday, playing the Sicilian, Ilyin-Genevsky sacrificed his queen against Capablanca and won, why shouldn’t I do the same?’ (B. Vainstein)

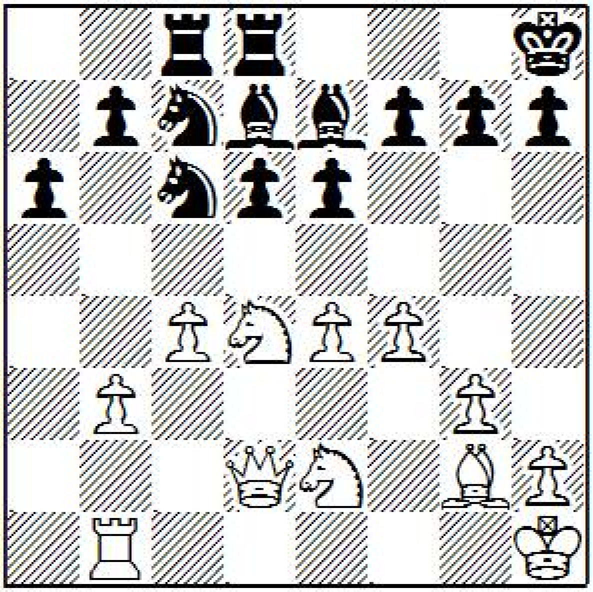
14 Ra1 Qxb2 15 Rfb1 Qxb1+ 16 Rxb1 Rfd8



17 c4 Ne8

White also has some advantage after 17 ... a6 18 Nc2 Nb8 19 Rd1 b5 20 Ne3 bxc4 21 Nxc4. But this does not concern Lasker at all: his main aim was to upset the opponent’s familiar routine, and to force him to play a position with an unusual balance of forces.

18 f4 a6 19 Kh1 (19 Nc2!? b5 20 cxb5 axb5 21 Rc1 Nf6 22 Qd3 Ra8 23 Ned4 was also not bad) **19 ... Nc7**



20 Qe3

20 Nxc6!? bxc6 21 Qa5 c5 22 Rd1 was interesting.

20 ... Rb8

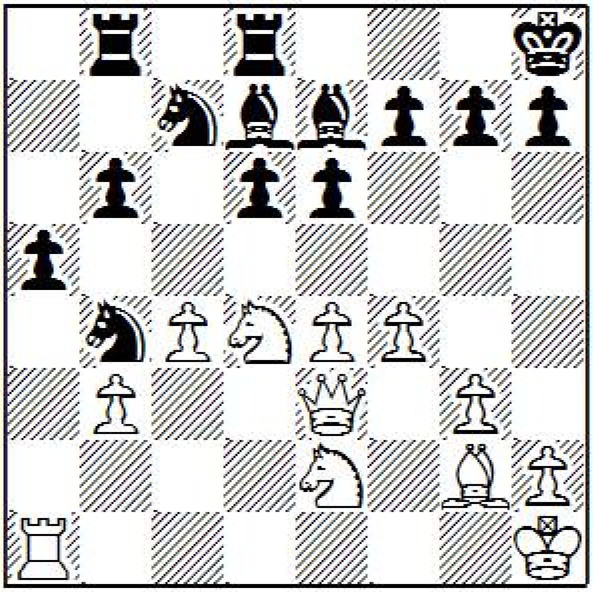
Black also has a choice: 20 ... Nxd4!? 21 Qxd4 b5 22 Qa7 e5 with counterplay.

21 Rd1 Nb4 22 Qc3 a5 23 Ra1? (White begins to ‘drift’; 23 Nc2 Nca6 24 Bf3 was correct) **23 ... b6**

Threatening ... Bf6.

24 Qe3?

A fatal mistake. White would have maintained approximate equality by 24 Rd1 Bf6 (or 24 ... Rbc8 25 Qf3 b5) 25 Qe3 b5 26 e5 dxe5 27 fxe5 Be7 28 Qf4 Be8 29 Nc3 bxc4 30 bxc4 Nca6 etc.



24 ... e5! 25 Nf5

Or 25 fxe5 dxe5 26 Nf5 Bxf5 27 exf5 Nc2 28 Qxe5 Bf6 29 Qxc7 Nxa1 30 Bd5 Nxb3 31 Qxf7 a4 and White is lost: 32 Qa7 Na5 33 Kg2 a3 34 Nc1 Bd4.

25 ... Bxf5 26 exf5 Nc2 27 Qc3 Nxa1 28 Qxa1 Bf6

The two rooks and the pawn easily overcome the queen.

29 Qg1 (29 Qe1 d5!; 29 Qa4 Na6 and ... Nc5) **29 ... d5! 30 cxd5 Nxd5 31 fxe5 Bxe5 32 g4 f6 33 h4 b5 34 Nd4 Ne3! 35 Qxe3 Rxd4 36 Bf3 a4 37 h5 a3 38 Qe2 Rbd8 0-1**

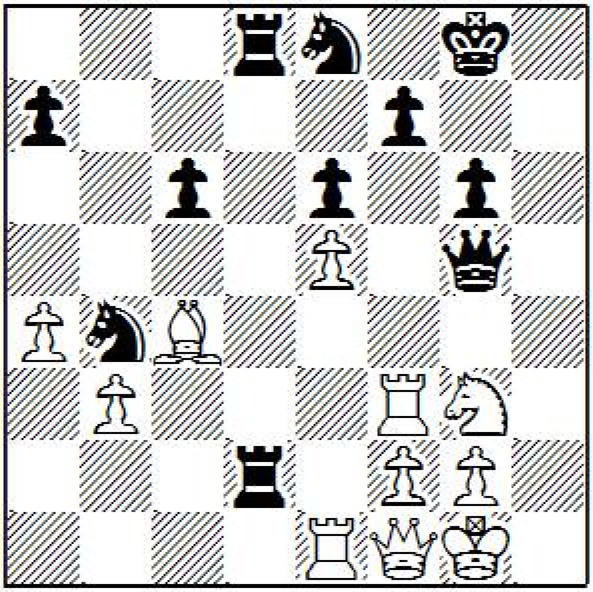
To the super-tournament in New York (1927), arranged to ‘accommodate’ Capablanca, Lasker was no longer invited. And the esteemed Doctor would have retired to a quiet life, fully engaged in philosophy, his favourite contract bridge and ... the ancient Japanese game of Go. But Lasker’s difficult material situation forced him to return to chess.

The appearance of the 65-year-old ex-monarch at the tournament in Zürich (1934) became the sensation of the season! In the very first round, thoughtfully smoking his usual cigar, he won against Euwe in the good old style.

Game 73

M.Euwe-Em.Lasker

Zürich 1934



The fork Ne4 is threatened, but:

34 ... Nc2!

An elegant rejoinder which Euwe had not anticipated.

35 Ne4 Qxe5!!

‘Colossal! Lasker gives up his queen, obtaining for it rook, minor piece and pawn,’ as occurred once in Moscow against Ilyin-Genevsky.’ (B. Vainstein)

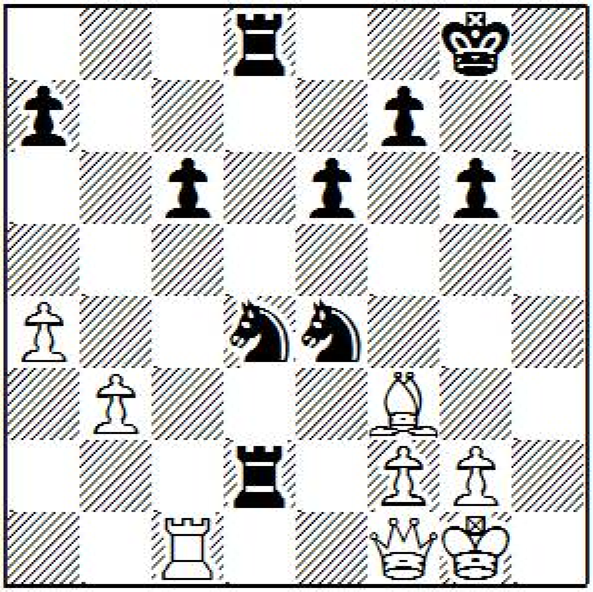
36 Nf6+ Qxf6 37 Rxf6 Nxf6

Also good was 37 ... Nxe1!? 38 Rf4 (38 Be2 Nxf6 39 Qxe1 Ne4 and 38 Rxg6+ fxg6 39 Bxe6+ Kg7 40 Qc4 R8d6 both win for Black) 38 ... Rd1 39 Kh2 R8d2 40 Be2 Nf3+ 41 Rxf3 Rxf1 42 Bxf1 Nd6 or 42 ... Kg7.

38 Rc1

After 38 Re2 Rd1 39 Rxc2 Rxf1+ 40 Bxf1 Rd6 Black is simply a pawn up as in the previous variation.

38 ... Ne4 39 Be2 Nd4 40 Bf3



40 ... Nxf2

Simpler was 40 ... Rd5 41 Bxe4 Ne2+ 42 Qxe2 Rxe2 43 Bxd5 cxd5 etc.

41 Qc4 Nd3 42 Rf1 Ne5 43 Qb4 Nexf3+ 44 gxf3 Ne2+ (44 ... Rd3! wins) **45 Kh2 Nf4+ 46 Kh1 R2d4 47 Qe7**

No better was 47 Qb7 Kg7 48 Qxc6 R8d5 etc.

47 ... Kg7! (weaving a mating net) **48 Qc7 R8d5 49 Re1 Rg5 50 Qxc6 Rd8! 0-1**

After starting with 3½ out of 4, Lasker took the lead, and then reached 5½ out of 7 ... ‘Unfortunately, the second half of the tournament was not so successful for him. He won three games, but also lost three, losing twice with White – to Bogoljubow and Nimzowitsch, and once with Black – to Alekhine. It is interesting that all three of these opponents were gaining their first win over Lasker,’ comment Vladimir and Isaak Linder in their encyclopaedia *Kings of the Chess World* (2001). ‘This poor finish to the tournament was quite understandable. The schedule was very severe – they played for eight hours every day, without any free days or adjournment days.’

The outcome of Zürich was fifth place after Alekhine, Flohr, Euwe and Bogoljubow. And a year later at the Second Moscow International Tournament (1935) the elderly former world champion achieved his last competitive triumph: 1-2. Botvinnik and Flohr – 13 out of 19; 3. Lasker – 12½ (undefeated!); 4. Capablanca – 12 etc.

It was not just that the second chess king again finished ahead of the third, but he also defeated him in their individual game, receiving one of the brilliancy prizes! ‘Lasker was the moral winner of the Moscow tournament,’ Zubarev wrote in his summarising article. ‘His play was just as deep and rich as in the best years of his phenomenal chess talent.’

In the very strong tournaments Moscow 1936 and Nottingham 1936 his results were more modest, but this is what the then world champion Alekhine wrote about him after Nottingham: ‘I consider that it is almost impossible to criticise Lasker, so great is my admiration for him as a person, an artist and a chess writer. At his 67 years, thanks to his youthful energy, will-to-win and incredibly deep treatment of the chess struggle, he remains the same Lasker, if not as a practical player, then as a chess thinker.’

For Lasker’s family this was a time of deprivation and wandering: the flight from Hitler’s Germany, a year and half in the USSR, departure to the USA in the autumn of the ominous year 1937, chronic lack of money and exhausting work ...

He died on 11 January 1941, soon after his 72nd birthday, on a day when he was visited by grandmaster Fine and his wife. Lasker could no longer speak. In a moment shortly before he died, his wife Martha heard Emanuel whisper: ‘King of chess ... ’

In conclusion, as has become customary, here are few opinions of the champions:

Lasker: ‘On the chess board lies and hypocrisy do not survive long. The creative combination lays bare the presumption of a lie; the merciless fact, culminating in a checkmate, contradicts the hypocrite.’

Capablanca: ‘Lasker, a natural genius, who developed thanks to very hard work in the early period of his career, never adhered to the type of play that could be classified as a definite style. None of the great players has been so incomprehensible to the majority of amateurs and even masters, as Emanuel Lasker.’

Alekhine: ‘Lasker was my teacher, and without him I could not have become whom I became. The idea of chess art is unthinkable without Emanuel Lasker.’

Botvinnik: ‘Great was Lasker’s role in the social recognition of chess, the realisation of its usefulness (“The game of chess eases our life’s struggle,” he said).’

Tal: ‘The greatest of the champions was, of course, Emanuel Lasker. At the chess board he accomplished the impossible! ... He was an amazing tactician, winning games that were apparently quite hopeless.’

Karpov: ‘The earlier leading lights – Lasker and especially Capablanca – hardly studied the openings at all. They were such geniuses and knew that they would be able to cope with any unpleasantness at the board – which they demonstrated in practice.’

chapter four

José Raúl The Third

The third world champion José Raúl Capablanca y Graupera (19 November 1888 – 8 March 1942) remains one of the most esteemed and legendary figures in the history of chess. In general there is something puzzling about the fact that the most renowned figures in chess – Morphy, Pillsbury, Capablanca and Fischer – were born in America. Although, for example, the last two were diametrically opposed to each other: Fischer was devoted to chess and wrapped up in the game, whereas ‘Capa’ was unfamiliar with theory and lived, at least in everyday life, outside of chess. He did almost nothing, he worked much less than other players – and he contrived to win the most important tournaments and matches, going undefeated for years (of all the champions he lost the fewest games). Is this not an indication of unlimited talent, of undoubted chess genius?!

Capablanca possessed an amazing ability to quickly see into a position and intuitively grasp its main features. His style, one of the purest, most crystal-clear in the entire history of chess, astonishes one with his logic. As he taught: ‘If you have thought up a definite plan, you should carry it out rigorously.’

This great positional player was, so to speak, a natural, intuitive successor of the Steinitz School. ‘Whereas Anderssen and Chigorin looked for accidental positions,’ writes Lasker, ‘Capablanca is guided by the logicality of strong positions. He values only that which is well-founded: solidity of position, pressure on a weak point, he does not trust the accidental, even if it be a problem-like mate, at the required moment he discovers and carries out subtle and far-sighted combinations ... ’

In contrast to his predecessor on the throne, Lasker, the great psychologist, Capablanca clearly underestimated the role of the psychological element in chess, saying: ‘When you sit down to play a game you should think only about the position, but not about the opponent.

Whether chess is regarded as a science, or an art, or a sport, all the same psychology bears no relation to it and only stands in the way of real chess.'

Alas, in the end this underestimation and the ease of his victories did him a bad service, as he lost the habit of working on chess: he was champion for only six years, although he could have held the crown for much longer ...

The Cuban Morphy

Capablanca was born in Havana, into a large and quite prosperous family. He made the acquaintance of chess when he was not yet five years old, by watching his father play. And from this moment his biography begins to be shrouded in legends. His father, who had been defeated by the boy three days later, took him to the famous Havana Chess Club, where they soon all realised that they could not give him a queen start. The Franco-Polish master Taubenhaus, who was visiting the club, later liked to recall: 'I am the only living master who has given Mr Capablanca a queen!'

The chess atmosphere in Havana was ideal for the growth of the young talent. Cuba was closely linked with the USA, and it had a strong aristocracy, rich clubs and equally rich chess traditions: back in the 1860s Morphy had twice given simultaneous displays in Havana, and in the late 1880s to the early 1890s matches for the world championship between Steinitz and Chigorin (and the Chigorin-Gunsberg match) were held there. Not without reason did Steinitz call the local club the 'Chess Eldorado': at that time chess was obviously flourishing in Havana, and there were players from whom one could learn. True, the young Capa was over-excited by the tense battles and as a result he was only allowed to play at home. At the age of eight he began going to the club on Sundays, and the master Golmayo could no longer give him a rook start, but then a new three-year break occurred.

Capablanca said that his passion for chess was fired by two events: the historic match between Steinitz and Chigorin (1892), which for years was discussed animatedly in Havana, and a simultaneous blindfold display by Pillsbury (1899): 'I was then a very mediocre player, but the reader can well imagine the impression on a child full of imagination produced by a man who could play simultaneously sixteen or more blindfold games of chess at the same time that he played a number of blindfold games of draughts and a hand of duplicate whist. The effect of Pillsbury's displays was immediate. They electrified me, and with the consent of my parents I began to visit the Havana Chess Club. By leaps and bounds I reached the top class in three months, and I was not over twelve when I defeated the champion of Cuba in a set match.' At the age of 13 he had already defeated all the leading Cuban players and towards the end of 1901 he won a match against the then champion of the country, Juan Corzo (+4 -3 =6).

In the summer of 1904 the youth's parents sent him to New York – to study English and to make preparations for entering Columbia University. I should mention that in the USA too there was something of a chess boom: everyone was talking about Marshall's sensational victory at the grandiose tournament in Cambridge Springs; in addition, the world champion Lasker had moved to America and had begun publishing his own magazine. And Capa, with his unique gift and knowledge of languages, picked up everything very quickly and made rapid progress. He began visiting the Manhattan Chess Club and quickly won recognition – in particular, by winning in 1906 a big blitz tournament in which Lasker himself competed. I don't know who the world champion lost to there, but it was then that he met Capablanca and even analysed some problematic position with him.

Soon José Raúl entered university, but within two years he bid farewell to a career as an engineer for the sake of chess. 'In closing this period and looking back upon my style of play I find a great deal of improvement in every respect,' Capablanca later recalled. 'The openings begin to resemble more those of a master, though generally they were much weaker than they should be, as there is too much of slow moving, elaborate plans which cannot be carried out against strong opponents, instead of the simple, forward, strong, attacking moves which should characterise White's development. The middle game has advanced enormously, the combinations are sure and more profound, and there begins to loom the playing for position. The endings I already played very well, and to my mind had attained the high standard for which they were in the future to be well known.'

Early in 1909 the 20-year-old Capablanca made a lengthy tour of 27 USA towns, playing 602 games in 31 simultaneous displays with the staggering result +571 -13 =18. For a complete triumph it only remained for him to defeat the permanent champion of the country, the 31-year-old Frank Marshall. The latter, of course, did not object to a match and accepted the challenge, expecting to defeat the inexperienced novice. A few years before this Marshall had lost matches to Lasker and Tarrasch, but they were the first and second players in the world, whereas this was some boy ... A serious delusion! Lasker was much more discerning, predicting a win for the Cuban and stating that he, Lasker, ‘will soon, probably, have to play a match for the world championship with Capablanca.’

The intriguing encounter between Capablanca and Marshall (April-June 1909) was held in several USA towns under the aegis of the Manhattan Chess Club. The winner was to be the first to win eight games. After five games Capa was already leading 2-0 (with three draws), and the sixth game demonstrated the overwhelming difference in class between the two opponents.

Game 74

J.R.Capablanca-F.Marshall

Match, Morristown 1909, 6th game

Ruy Lopez C62

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 d6 4 c3 Bg4?! (what for?!) **5 d3 Be7 6 Nbd2 Nf6 7 0-0 0-0 8 Re1** (Capa plays the opening quietly, not seeing any need to force the play)

8 ... h6?!

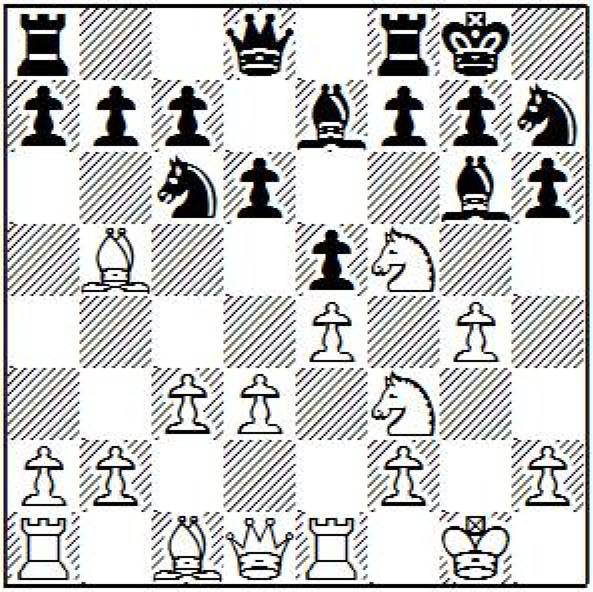
Too slow. Nowadays any master would simply play 8 ... Nd7.

9 Nf1 Nh7?! 10 Ne3 Bh5

‘If 10 ... f5 11 exf5 Bxf5 12 Nxf5 Rxf5 13 d4 and White should win, because if 13 ... exd4 14 Bxc6 followed by 15 Nxd4 wins at least a pawn, and if 13 ... Bf6 (instead of 13 ... exd4) then 14 Bd3 wins the exchange.’ (Capablanca)

11 g4! Bg6 12 Nf5

A turning point.



12 ... h5?

Should one really help the opponent on that flank where he is attacking?! Marshall himself opens the h-file, along which he will be mated – nothing more and nothing less!

Of course ‘better would have been 12 ... Ng5 in order to simplify the position,’ (Capablanca) for example: 13 Kg2 Nxf3 14 Qxf3 Bg5 15 Rh1 Bxc1 16 Raxc1 Ne7 17 h4 c6 and Black is alright (Lasker), or 13 d4!? Nxf3+ 14 Qxf3 exd4 (but not 14 ... Bg5?! 15 Bxc6 bxc6 16 dxe5! dxe5 17 Rd1) 15 Bxc6 bxc6 16 cxd4 Rb8 with a slightly inferior position, but this is not at all the same as that which occurred in the game: here there is a safety margin and nothing tragic. Whereas now Black’s position deteriorates sharply.

13 h3 hxg4?!

13 ... Bg5! was better, although after 14 Nxg5 Nxg5 15 Kg2 d5 16 gxh5 Bxf5 17 exf5 White has an obvious advantage.

14 hxg4 Bg5

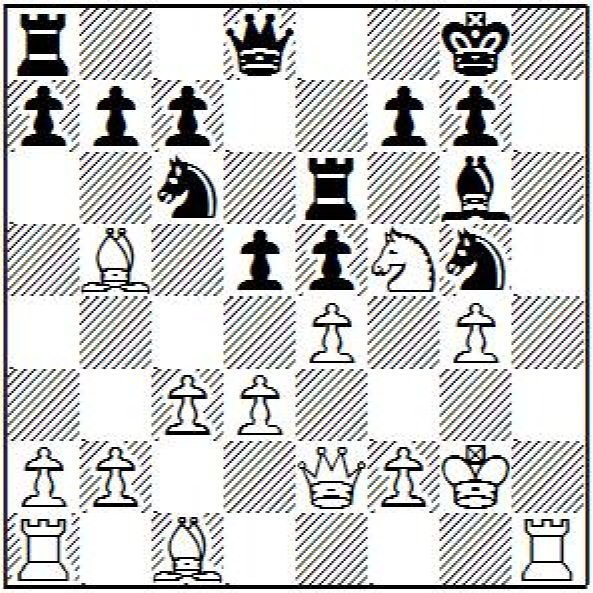
‘I would have preferred 14 ... Ng5, though the chances are that the game cannot be saved.’ (Capablanca)

15 Nxg5 Nxg5 16 Kg2 d5 17 Qe2 Re8 18 Rh1

Here is where it begins ... But in fact the game is already decided: White is simply playing for mate.

18 ... Re6

In the words of a number of commentators, this is one of the famous Marshall traps. Nowadays such ‘devilish traps’ merely provoke a smile ...



19 Qe3

‘If White is tempted into winning the clear exchange – 19 Bxg5 (*! – G. K.*) 19 ... Qxg5 20 exd5 Bxf5 21 dxe6 Bxg4 22 exf7+?, then after 22 ... Kxf7 23 Qe3 (*if 23 f3! Black has only perpetual check: 23 ... Bh3+ 24 Kf2 Qh4+ 25 Ke3 Qf4+ – G. K.*) 23 ... Bh3+!! he is unexpectedly mated.’ (Panov) However, immediately decisive is 22 Qe3! Qg6 (22 ... Qxe3 23 exf7+) 23 Qg3 Qxe6 24 Bc4 Qg6 25 Rh4 Bf5 26 Qxg6 Bxg6 27 Rah1, and there aren’t in fact any devilish traps! Also bad is 21 ... Bxe6 (instead of 21 ... Bxg4) 22 Bxc6 bxc6 (22 ... Bxg4? 23 Bf3) 23 f3 etc.

I would imagine that Capablanca did not even calculate these variations: why strain himself, if 19 Qe3 was sufficient? This was the winner’s comment: ‘A very important move, the object of which is to shut off the action of the opposing queen, and at the same time to bring the white queen into the game. It also creates a weak diagonal in Black’s game, against which the white bishop can act.’

Well, up to a certain time such moves sufficed for Capa. With Marshall he did not need to calculate, with Lasker (1921) he could afford to miscue slightly, but with Alekhine (1927), when extreme accuracy was required, he no longer had the strength for complicated calculations: his laziness had become a habit of many years' standing ...

19 ... f6 20 Ba4!

A simple transference of the 'Spanish' bishop to its rightful place.

20 ... Ne7 21 Bb3 c6 22 Qg3 a5?!

Black's position is strategically hopeless, but why also weaken the queenside?

23 a4 Nf7 24 Be3 b6

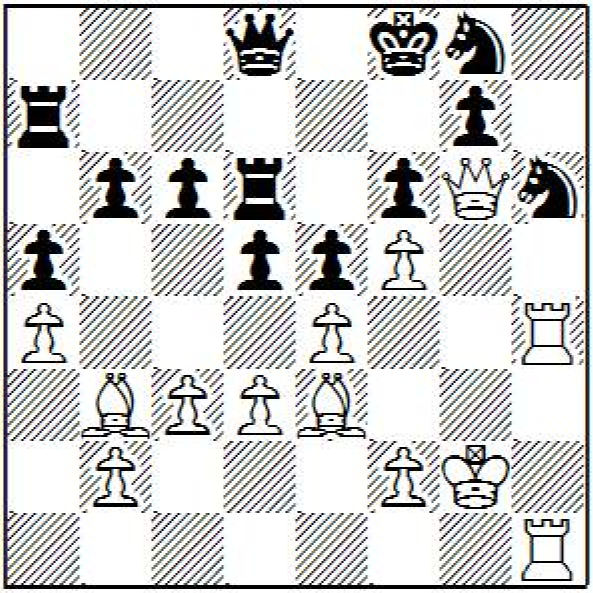
Preventing Bc5, but the b6-pawn becomes an eternal weakness. There is nothing more that particularly needs commenting on: White has a clear winning plan.

25 Rh4 Kf8 26 Rah1 Ng8 27 Qf3!

'Compelling Black to take the knight, strengthening still more the position of White.' (Capablanca)

27 ... Bxf5 28 gxf5 Rd6 29 Qh5 Ra7 30 Qg6 Nfh6

30 ... Ne7 31 Rh8+ Nxh8 32 Rxh8+ Ng8 33 Qh7 Kf7 is also bad in view of 34 Bd1 or 34 Bxb6.



31 Rxh6! gxh6 (31 ... Nxh6 33 Bxh6 wins) **32 Bxh6+ Ke7 33 Qh7+ Ke8 34 Qxg8+ Kd7 35 Qh7+ Qe7 36 Bf8 Qxh7 37 Rxh7+ Kc8 38 Rxa7 1-0**

'This is one of my best games.' (Capablanca)

In the seventh game Marshall managed to open his account, but then he was completely overwhelmed. After winning the eighth, 11th, 12th and 13th games, Capablanca only had to score one more win. And here there suddenly came a string of draws – the eternal accompaniment to unlimited matches in the 20th century: the players played nine successive draws!

The last game in the match was the 23rd, the finish to which created an indelible impression on Capablanca's contemporaries. It is a classic example of converting a factor that had been exalted by Steinitz and Tarrasch – a queenside pawn majority.

Game 75

F.Marshall-J.R.Capablanca

Match, New York 1909, 23rd game

Queen's Gambit D33

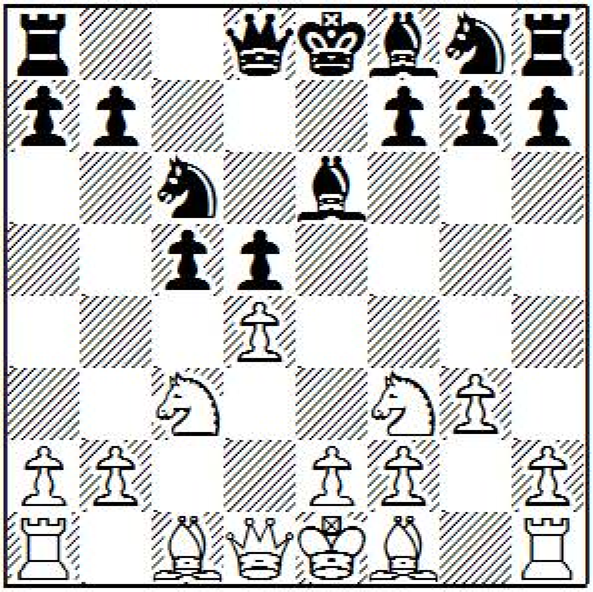
1 d4 d5 2 c4

Not without reason was Marshall called the 'fearless knight of the Queen's Gambit': this is how he played throughout the match, with the exception of the 17th game, where the Four Knights Game occurred.

2 ... e6 3 Nc3 c5

Capablanca's main weapon was the defence named after Lasker, who had employed it against Marshall in the match for the world championship (1907) – 3 ... Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e3 Ne4 6 Bxe7 Qxe7 etc. Here the Cuban did not have any particular problems and he achieved a score of +3 -1 =4.

4 cxd5 exd5 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 g3 Be6?!



Later Capablanca also played this against Rubinstein (*Game No.64*). But then he gave up the Tarrasch Defence, deciding not to give himself weaknesses. Even so, 6 ... Nf6 7 Bg2 Be7 is more accurate – the c8-bishop can come out to g4, and the king's rook to e8, creating pressure on the e-file.

7 Bg2 Be7

In the first game after 7 ... Nf6 8 Bg5 h6 9 Bxf6 Qxf6 10 0-0 cxd4 11 Nb5 Rc8 12 Nfxd4 Bc5 14 Nxe6 fxe6 15 Qa4+ Kf7 Capa gained a draw without difficulty.

8 0-0 Nf6 9 Bg5?!

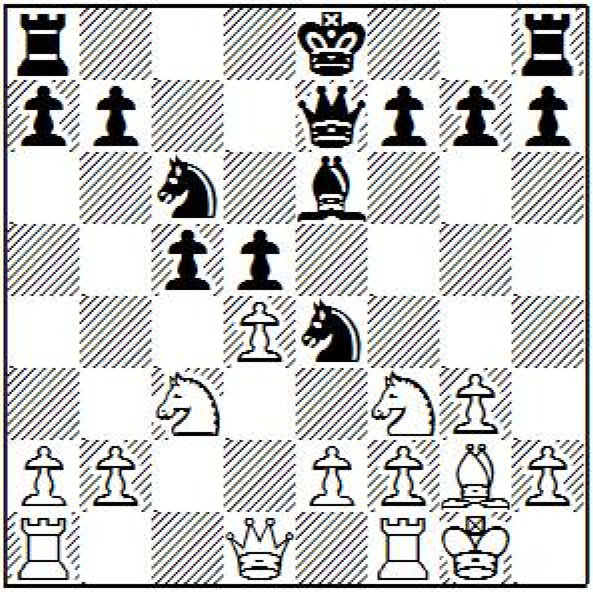
With the bishop at e6 this is an inaccuracy. Better is the modest 9 b3!? or the more rigid 9 dxc5 Bxc5 10 Na4! (to Bogoljubow's move 10 Ng5 there is the simple reply 10 ... 0-0) 10 ... Be7 11 Be3 0-0 12 Nd4 (Réti), with a slight but enduring advantage.

9 ... Ne4!

'A very good reply which frees Black's game. Before this game was played Rubinstein and Mieses had engaged in a series of games which were shown to me by some of my friends desirous of knowing my opinion with respect to them. I liked Mieses' ninth move 9 ... Ne4, and I decided to play it against Marshall, whom I hoped had not seen the games.' (Capablanca)

Incidentally, if instead of ... Be6 Black has played ... 0-0, the relieving manoeuvre 9 ... Ne4? is not possible, since after 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 the d5-pawn is hanging.

10 Bxe7 Qxe7



The first critical moment.

11 Ne5?

In totally the wrong direction! This is a typical attempt by Marshall to initiate some unjustified tactics out of nothing. ‘Of course, if 11 dxc5 Nxc3 with an excellent game.’ (Capablanca) But there are also normal moves – 11 e3 or 11 Rc1.

Strangely enough, Marshall had already crushed Mieses with 11 Rc1 (Berlin 3rd matchgame 1908): 11 ... Rd8?! 12 dxc5 Nxc5 13 b4 Ne4 14 b5 Na5 15 Qd4 Nxc3 16 Qxc3 Nc4 17 Qxg7 etc. It is probable that he had in fact seen the game Rubinstein-Mieses (Frankfurt 2nd matchgame 1909), which went 11 ... Nxc3! 12 Rxc3 c4 13 Ne5 0-0 14 b3?! Qb4 15 Qd2 Rac8 16 Rd1 b5 17 f4 Nxe5 18 fxe5 a5 with equal chances. Rubinstein suggested 14 f4 with the idea of f4-f5 or e2-e4, but here too there is nothing terrible for Black: 14 ... f6! 15 Nxc6 bxc6 16 e4 dxe4 17 Bxe4 Bd5 with equality.

11 ... Nxd4!

Simple and convincing. There is no need for 11 ... Nxc3 12 bxc3 Nxe5 13 dxe5 0-0 (13 ... Qd7 14 f4 g6 15 e4!; 13 ... Rd8 14 Qa4+) 14 Bxd5 Rad8

15 e4 Bxd5 (inferior is 15 ... Bh3?! 16 Re1 Qxe5 17 Qb3 b6 18 f4 Qe7 19 a4 Tarrasch) 16 exd5 Qxe5 17 c4 b5 18 Re1 Qf5 with an unclear game.

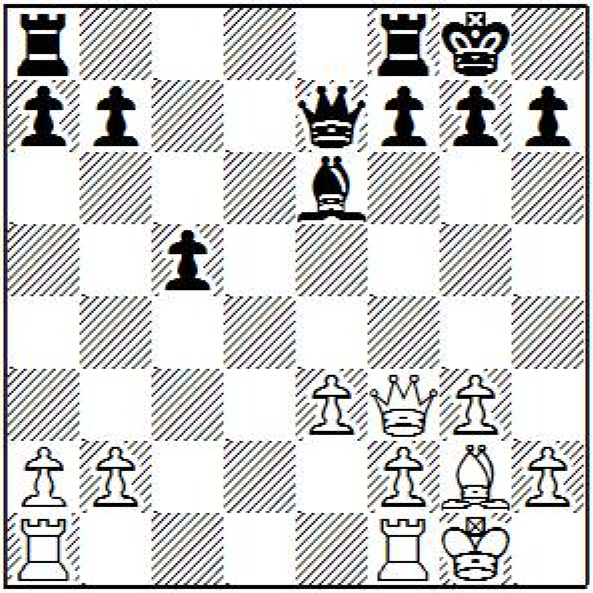
12 Nxe4 dxe4 13 e3 (but not 13 Bxe4? Bh3 and wins) **13 ... Nf3+!**

Again the simplest. If 13 ... Nb5?, then 14 Qa4 a6 15 Qxe4.

14 Nxf3

‘Better would have been 14 Bxf3 exf3 15 Qa4+. I had the intention at the time to play 15 ... Kf8 against this check and not 15 ... Bd7?, which would have simplified the game, taking away all chances of winning.’ (Capablanca) I agree: 15 ... Bd7 16 Nxd7 Qxd7 17 Qe4+ Qe7 18 Qxf3 with equality. And after 15 ... Kf8! they recommended 16 Rfd1, overlooking 16 ... g6! 17 Nxf3 Kg7 with an excellent game for Black.

14 ... exf3 15 Qxf3 0-0!



16 Rfc1

‘Black has the better game, since White cannot play 16 Qxb7 because of 16 ... Qxb7 17 Bxb7 Rab8 followed by 18 ... Rxb2, holding all the lines and having a free pawn to boot, which should win.’ (Capablanca) Panov and other commentators are of the same opinion, but in my opinion from the practical standpoint this was the surest way to save the game: 18 Bg2 Rxb2 19 Rfc1! c4 20 Bf1 Rc8 21 Rc3 with good drawing chances.

They all concertedly and rather dogmatically suggested immediately creating counterplay with 16 e4, then Qe3 and f2-f4. But after 16 ... Rfd8 17

Qe3 Rd4! it is not clear if the white pawns will begin advancing, whereas the d-file is in Black's possession and the weaknesses in White's position are irreparable. For the moment the move in the game does not spoil anything: Marshall simply activates his rook, not yet suspecting what is awaiting him.

16 ... Rab8 17 Qe4 (with the idea of 18 Bh3) **17 ... Qc7!**

Avoiding the exchange of bishops: Black's bishop is better!

18 Rc3

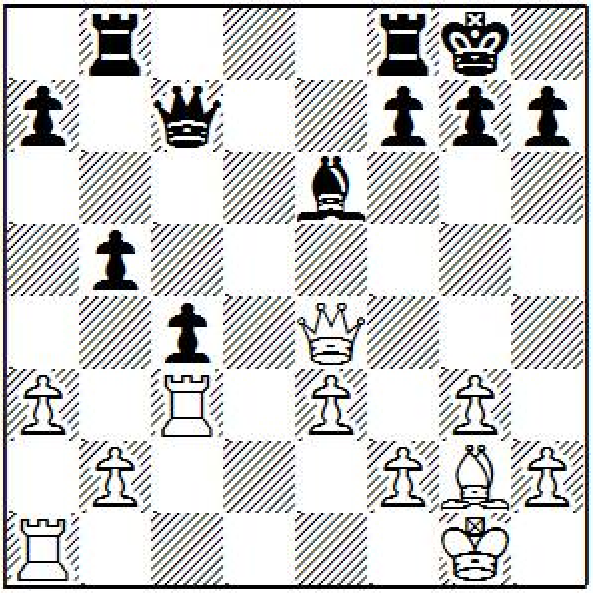
Another myth: '18 f4 was better.' (Panov) This merely weakens White's position and after 18 ... Rfd8 his difficulties increase. He should not be advancing pawns, but defending!

18 ... b5 19 a3

In my opinion, for a draw 19 b3!? was nevertheless preferable. This is what modern masters would have played.

19 ... c4

Another micro-nuance. Capa exploits the unfortunate position of the rook at c3.

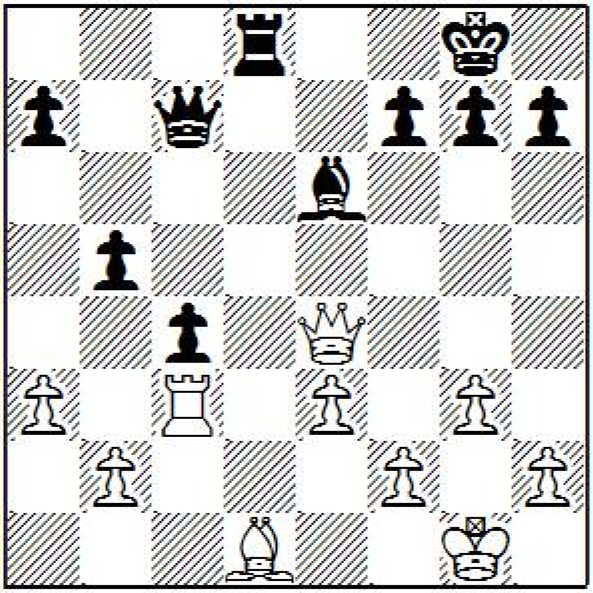


20 Bf3?!

Also weak was 20 b3?! Qa5! 21 b4 Qc7. According to Lasker, 20 Rd1 was necessary, and if 20 ... Rfd8 21 Rcc1!, connecting the rooks. Black has a small plus, but there is nothing decisive.

Apparently Marshall was satisfied by the fact that Black’s pawns were standing on squares of the colour of his bishop. But these pawns will soon begin advancing ...

20 ... Rfd8 21 Rd1 Rxd1+ 22 Bxd1 Rd8



‘Black now has full command of the board. His play is an example of how slight advantages should be utilised.’ (Lasker)

Only seven moves of quiet play have passed, and strategically the game is already decided: Black has advanced his queenside pawns, while White has placed his rook offside and conceded the d-file. It is hard to imagine that the player with White was a recent challenger for the crown, a grandmaster from the world’s top ten!

23 Bf3 g6!

With the threat of 24 ... Bd5 25 Qg4 h5. According to Steinitz and even Philidor, Black supposedly should have played ... h7-h6. But Capa subtly observed that in the given instance it was not a question of pawns on squares of the same colour as the bishop, but of the most harmonious arrangement of the forces, killing White’s counterplay, since in any case things will be decided by a breakthrough on the queenside.

24 Qc6 (24 Rc2? Bf5) **24 ... Qe5!**

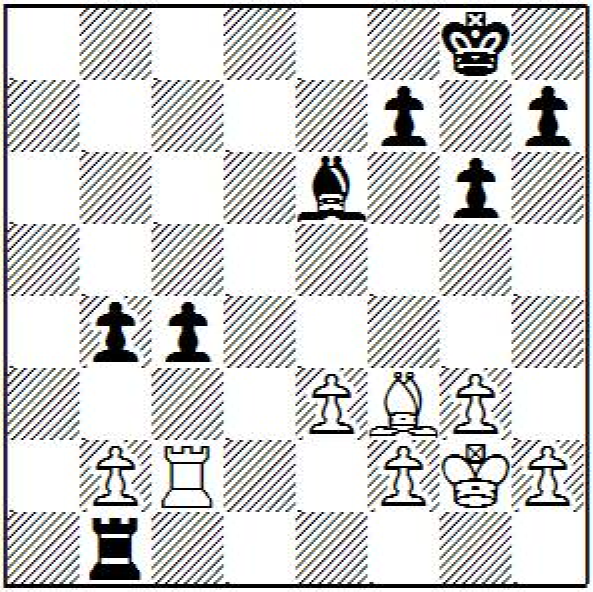
24 ... Qxc6 25 Bxc6 a6 was also possible, but Black exchanges in a more favourable situation.

25 Qe4 Qxe4 26 Bxe4 Rd1+!

'Very important. Black must stop the approach of the white king by means of Bc2 followed by Kf1 etc.' (Capablanca)

27 Kg2 a5 (setting about the creation of a passed pawn) **28 Rc2 b4 29 axb4 axb4 30 Bf3 Rb1**

The last critical position, which is now bad for White: Black has achieved everything that he wanted.



31 Be2?

This loses the bishop! With 31 Rd2 it was still possible to resist – at the least, some accuracy would have been required of Black: 31 ... Ra1! 32 Be2 Ra2 33 Kf1 c3 34 Rd8+ Kg7 35 bxc3 Ra1+! 36 Rd1 (or 36 Kg2 bxc3 37 Bd1 Ra2) 36 ... Rxd1+ 37 Bxd1 b3 winning. But now comes the Cuban's star turn – an elegant little combination.

31 ... b3! 32 Rd2

If 32 Rc3, then 32 ... Rxb2 33 Bxc4 Rc2!, also winning a piece.

32 ... Rc1! 33 Bd1

Or 33 Kf3 Rc2 34 Rd4 c3 35 bxc3 b2 36 Rb4 Bd5+ 37 e4 Rxc3+ 38 Kf4 Bb3.

33 ... c3 34 bxc3 b2! 35 Rxb2 (35 Bc2? Rxc2) **35 ... Rxd1 36 Rc2 Bf5 37 Rb2 Rc1 38 Rb3 Be4+ 39 Kh3 Rc2 40 f4 h5**

‘Threatening 41 ... Bf5+ followed by 42 ... Rxh2+ and 43 ... Kg7. The rest requires no further comment.’ (Capablanca)

41 g4 hxg4+ 42 Kxg4 Rxh2 43 Rb4 f5+ 44 Kg3 Re2 45 Rc4 Rxe3+ 46 Kh4 Kg7 47 Rc7+ Kf6 48 Rd7 Bg2 49 Rd6+ Kg7 0-1

The simplicity with which Black promoted his pawn had a colossal influence on the minds of players. After this game many acquired a superstitious horror of a pawn majority on the queenside, as though it automatically gave an advantage. It was only many years later that this was disputed by Alekhine in a game with Yates (*Game No.116*), and he was proved right – every position should be approached concretely: A flank majority reigns in a technical endgame, where an outside passed pawn can be calmly created, but in positions of a middlegame type the central pawns may give serious counterplay or even an attack. But to make this step forward, it required an Alekhine ...

And so, the novice won the match with the sensational score +8 -1 =14. In the USA he was christened ‘the Cuban Morphy’, and in Cuba he was greeted as a national hero. ‘I can safely say that no player ever performed such a feat,’ writes Capablanca without false modesty, ‘as it was my first encounter against a master, and such a master, one of the first ten in the whole world. The most surprising feature of all was the fact that I played without having ever opened a book to study the openings; in fact, had Marshall played such things as Danish Gambits, Vienna Openings, or the like, the result might have been different. I certainly should have experienced more difficulty in obtaining such a result.’

In my view, it was not even the question of the score, but of the fact that Capa played a completely different type of chess. The games of the match show that, thanks to his incredible natural talent, he understood chess simply differently, on some level that was unknown to his opponent. This difference in understanding was the equivalent of at least two categories! Marshall was quite a good grandmaster; he played concretely, making sudden attacks, but without much of a feeling for position. But Capablanca thought in schemes, he saw plans, and used general conceptions, something that at the time was not accessible to many, only the chosen few – Lasker, Tarrasch, Schlechter, Rubinstein ...

Now these few had been joined by Capablanca, and with the years he raised his positional understanding to perfection. He knew exactly which piece to place where, and it was as though he could see through a position.

It was for this reason that the Cuban so rarely lost: there was hardly anyone who could win against him.

Drama in San Sebastian

Capablanca's debut in the world arena took place at the important international tournament in San Sebastian (1911), which attracted all the stars of those times, apart from Lasker, the current world champion, and Alekhine, who was as yet too young. Playing here were the chief contender for the throne, the incomparable Rubinstein, and all the participants in the recent matches for the world championship – Schlechter, Janowski, Tarrasch, Marshall ... They invited only masters who had at least twice taken fourth prize or better in tournaments during the previous decade. The only exception was made for the 22-year-old Capa – in view of his impressive victory in his match with Marshall.

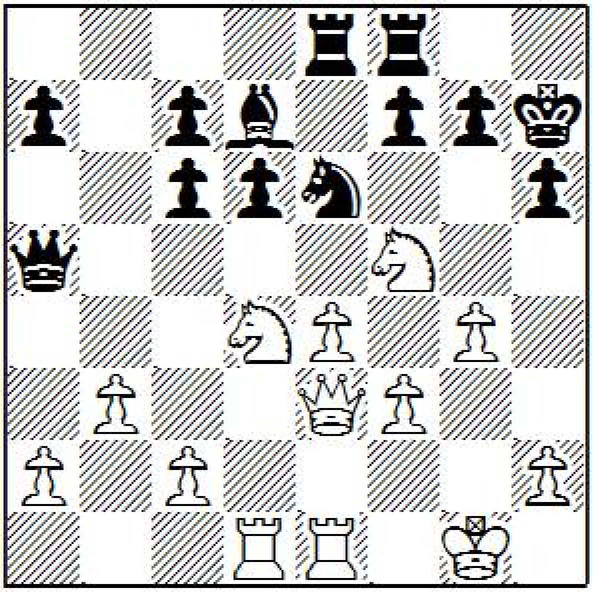
'Some of the masters,' Capablanca later recalled, 'objected to my entry before this clause was known. One of them was Dr Bernstein. I had the good fortune to play him in the first round, and beat him in such fashion as to obtain the Rothschild prize for the most brilliant game of the tournament.'

(Something similar happened many years later at the strong tournament in Banja Luka 1979. The venerable participants expressed their displeasure over the invitation to the 16-year-old Baku schoolboy Kasparov, who did not hold an international title. The most indignant was grandmaster Vukic. It need hardly be said that he shared Bernstein's fate ...)

Game 76

J.R.Capablanca-O.Bernstein

San Sebastian 1911, 1st round



22 Ne2?!

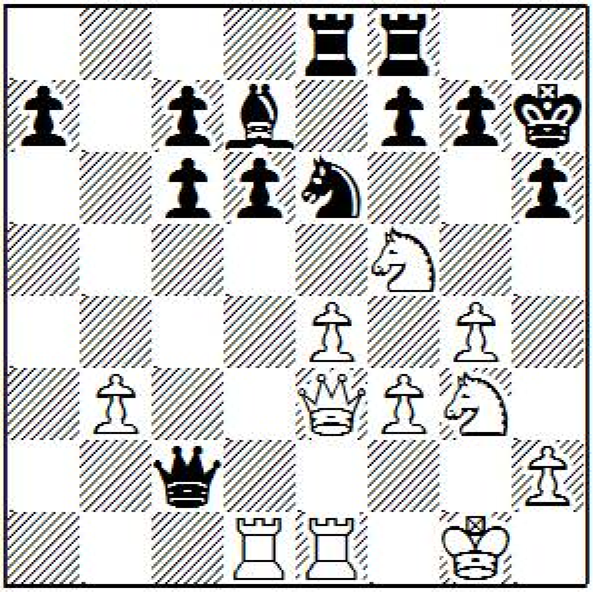
A purely intuitive sacrifice of the a2-pawn for the sake of an attack on the king. All the commentators, beginning with Capablanca, considered the sacrifice to be more than correct, but whether it was in fact we will now see. I think that by around the year 1925 the Cuban would no longer have played 22 Ne2?! ...

22 ... Qxa2!?

Of course, 22 ... Qb6 was quieter – perhaps after 23 Kg2 Qxe3 24 Nxe3 White has a small plus, but this still has to be demonstrated. As Capa proudly writes, ‘I can say, because of the conversation that I had at the time with Dr Bernstein, that he had not the slightest idea of what was coming. He is not much to be blamed, however, because the combination involved is very deep and difficult to foresee.’ However, nowadays such a pawn would probably be taken not only by a Korchnoi: indeed, for the moment nothing concrete for White is apparent.

23 Neg3 Qxc2

But here they all attach a question mark. According to Lasker, 23 ... f6!? 24 Nh5 Rf7 was necessary. I agree that this is not bad, especially as after the sharp 25 Nxh6 gxh6 26 Qc3 Qa3 27 Nxf6+ Rxf6 28 Qxf6 Qc5+ 29 Kh1 Ng7 there is nothing terrible for Black. But what if the capture on c2 should also prove useful?!

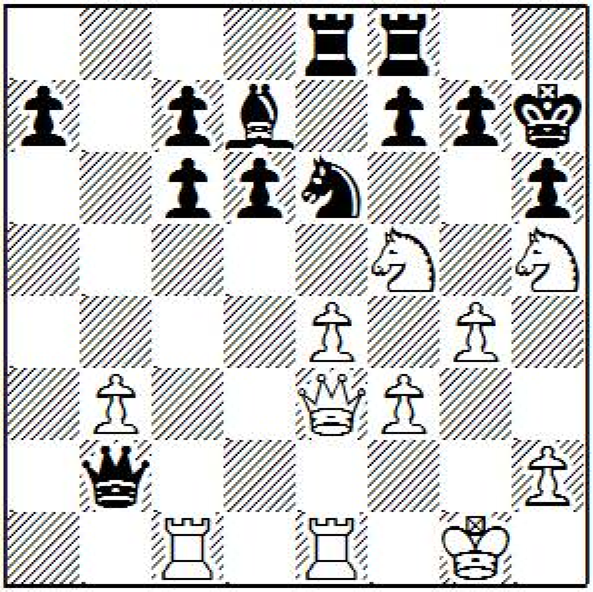


24 Rc1

Parrying the threat of ... Qc5. Bearing in mind the difficulties that White could have faced in the game, I would suggest the unclear 24 Nh5 Qc5 25 e5! (but not 25 Qxc5 Nxc5 26 Nfxg7? Rb8!) 25 ... Qxe3+ 26 Rxe3 Nc5 27 Nfxg7!?

24 ... Qb2 25 Nh5

‘The march of this knight is most remarkable. Even now it looks inoffensive, and yet it is this knight that is going to decide the game.’ (Capablanca) But only because of Black’s weak play!



25 ... Rh8?

‘There was nothing better (*?? – G. K.*). If 25 ... g6 26 Qxh6+ Kg8 27 e5 gxh5 28 gxh5 and White wins because there is no way to stop one of the rooks from checking in the open g-file (*28 ... Qxb3 29 Re2 and Rg2+ – G. K.*). If 25 ... g5 26 e5 f6 27 Qd3, and with proper play White will win. I do not give the variations because they are very long and complicated.’ (Capablanca)

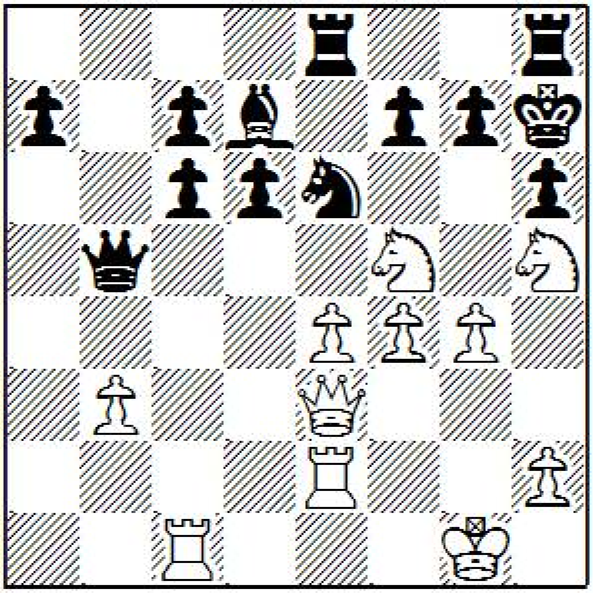
A typical comment: the third world champion did not greatly favour long and complicated variations! Yet no one has shown how after 25 ... g5!? 26 e5 f6 27 Qd3 Kh8! White wins. But what is more important – no one has shown what he is to do after 26 ... Nf4! (instead of 26 ... f6), for example: 27 Nxf4 Rxe5 28 Nd3 Rxe3 29 Nxb2 Rxb3 with an excellent game for Black.

I should add that even after the more restrained 25 ... Rg8!? 26 Re2 (26 Nhxg7?! Rxg7 27 Qxh6+ Kg8) 26 ... Qe5 27 f4 Qb5 28 Nfxg7?! Rxg7 29 Nf6+ Kh8 30 f5 Ng5 the only question is whether White can save the game.

There’s the ‘deep combination’ for you ... To be objective, I should mention that most of the grandmasters of that time did not defend any better than Bernstein, and therefore Capa’s risky fantasies, which with the years became increasingly rare, were something that he usually got away with.

26 Re2 Qe5 27 f4 Qb5

The queen is shut off from the defence of the kingside, and the unfortunate position of the rook at h8 allows White to land a veiled blow.



28 Nfxg7! Nc5?

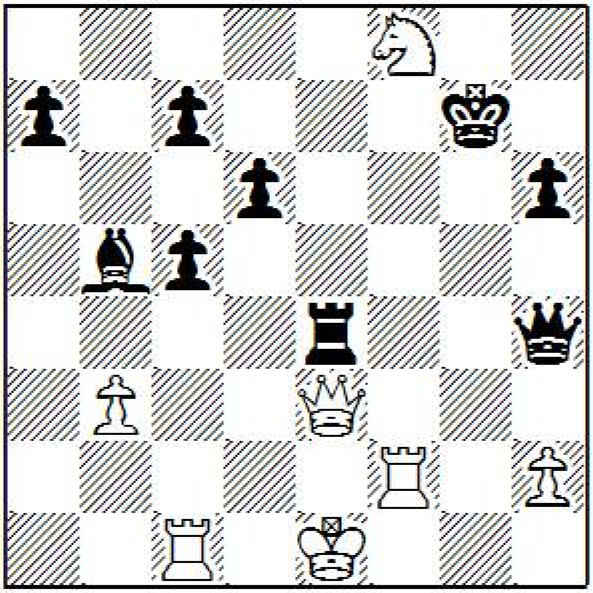
Another mistake, apparently due to time-trouble. Capablanca expected 28 ... Nxg7 29 Nf6+ Kg6 30 Nxd7 f6! (the spectacular 31 f5+ Kh7 32 Nf6 mate! was threatened) 31 e5! Kf7 32 Nxf6 Re7 33 Ne4, ‘and Black’s position is untenable’.

It is a pity that he did not examine the cool defence 28 ... Rd8! In this case, as Panov writes, ‘by 29 f5 Nf8 (29 ... Nxg7?? 30 Nf6 mate; *29 ... Nc5 30 g5! Qd3 31 g6+! – G. K.*) 30 e5! White would have gained an irresistible attack: 30 ... Qxe5 31 Qd2! Qb5 32 Qb2 Rg8 33 Nf6+ Kxg7 34 Nxd7+ Kh7 35 Nf6+ Kh8 36 Re7, or 30 ... Rg8 31 e6 fxe6 32 fxe6 Nxe6 33 Qe4+! Kh8 34 Nxe6 Qxh5 (34 ... Bxe6? 35 Qxe6 Qxh5 36 Qf6+ Kh7 37 Re7+) 35 Rg2.’ However, this last variation needs to be continued and improved:

1) 35 ... Bxe6 36 gxh5 Rxg2+ 37 Qxg2 (37 Kxg2? Bd5) 37 ... Rg8 38 Qxg8+ Kxg8 39 Rxc6 (39 b4 Bd5 40 Ra1 c5) 39 ... Bxb3 40 Rxc7 leads to an endgame with rook against bishop, where the win for White, if there is one at all, requires a separate analysis;

2) 35 ... Qe8 36 Qd4+ Kh7 37 Nxd8 Qxd8 38 Qd3+ Kh8 39 h3 with the better position for White, but one that is still far from won.

Therefore I tried to improve his play with 33 Nxe6!? (instead of 33 Qe4+). The computer quickly produced a fantastic variation, unexpectedly confirming Capablanca's self-advertising words, that 'this combination taken as a whole is one of the longest and most difficult ever played over the board': 33 ... Rxg4+ 34 Kf1 Qxh5 (34 ... Qf5+ 35 Rf2 Qxe6 36 Nf6+ Kg6 37 Nxg4 wins) 35 Nxd8 c5! 36 Rf2! Bb5+ 37 Ke1 Qh4 38 Ne6 Re4 39 Nf8+ Kg7.



Analysis diagram

Black would appear to have sufficient attack for the rook but ... 40 Kd2!! Qg4! (40 ... Rxe3 41 Rg1+) 41 Qc3+ Kg8 42 Qg3 Qxg3 43 hxg3 Kg7 44 Re1 wins.

In addition, White can consider 29 Nf5!? (instead of 29 f5) 29 ... Qb6 30 Ra1 with a serious initiative, even without the queens: 30 ... a5 (30 ... Nc5? 31 Kh1 Bxf5 32 Qc3! Rhg8 33 Nf6+ Kh8 34 Nxg8+ Kxg8 35 gxf5 wins) 31 Kg2 Qxe3 32 Rxe3 c5 33 Ne7 etc.

29 Nxe8 Bxe8 30 Qc3 f6

No better was 30 ... Rg8 31 Nf6+ Kg7 32 Re3, or 30 ... Ne6 31 Nf6+ Kg6 (31 ... Kg7 32 Nxe8+) 32 f5+ Kg5 33 h4+ Kxh4 34 Rh2+ Kg5 35 Rh5+ with a rapid mate.

31 Nxf6+ Kg6 32 Nh5 Rg8 33 f5+ Kg5 ('forgetting' to resign) **34 Qe3+ Kh4 35 Qg3+ 1-0**

35 ... Kg5 36 h4 mate!

After this win Capa gained respect and he was no longer regarded as easy prey. But even so in this, his first international tournament, and such a strong one at that, the Cuban did not feel altogether confident. Later he recalled that it was rather terrible for him in the company of the strongest players in Europe: the debutant was all the time fearful that they would make moves that he had not anticipated.

And although he started with 3 out of 4, in his game with Janowski, one of the most experienced fighters, his fears were confirmed. Capablanca later admitted: ‘In this game I was for the first time in my life to have the feeling of being completely outplayed by my opponent; time after time, up to my twenty-third move, I would figure some reply of my adversary only to find out immediately that I was wrong, and that some other move that he had made was superior to the one I had thought best.’

Game 77

J.R.Capablanca-D.Janowski

San Sebastian 1911, 5th round

Queen’s Gambit D40

1 d4 d5 2 e3 Nf6 3 Nf3 c5 4 c4 e6 5 Nc3 Be7

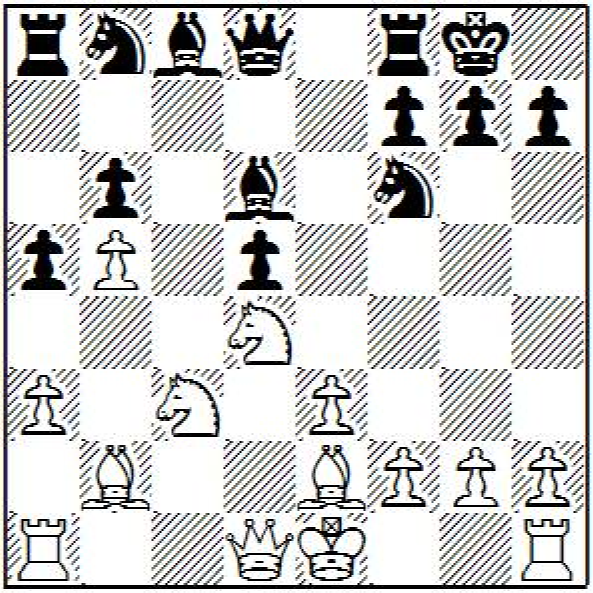
5 ... dxc4 or 5 ... Nc6 is usually played, but Janowski ‘wanted to induce White to give up his centre pawn while keeping his own on d5.’ (Ed. Lasker)

6 dxc5 0-0 7 a3 (7 cxd5! is more accurate) **7 ... Bxc5 8 b4 Be7** (8 ... Bd6!?) **9 Bb2 a5!? 10 b5**

Of course, not 10 c5? b6!

10 ... b6 11 cxd5 exd5 12 Nd4 Bd6 13 Be2

‘I saw at the time that 13 g3 seemed the proper continuation, but I became afraid of being criticised for creating such a formation of pawns on the kingside.’ (Capablanca) According to Edward Lasker, then 13 ... Bg4! is a good reply. Even so, I think that after 14 f3 Be6 15 Kf2 Ra7 16 Be2 White has quite a favourable position.



13 ... Be6 14 Bf3?!

Of course, 14 0-0 was better, not weakening the c4-square. In a complicated, non-standard position where both sides have weaknesses, playing merely on general considerations, ‘by eye’, does not work!

14 ... Ra7! 15 0-0 Rc7 16 Qb3?!

A blank shot. 16 Qd2 or 16 Rc1 was more solid, but not 16 Nxd5? Nxd5 17 Bxd5 Bxh2+! 18 Kxh2 Qh4+ 19 Kg1 Bxd5 20 Nf3 Bxf3 21 Qxf3 Rc5 etc.

16 ... Nbd7! 17 Rfd1

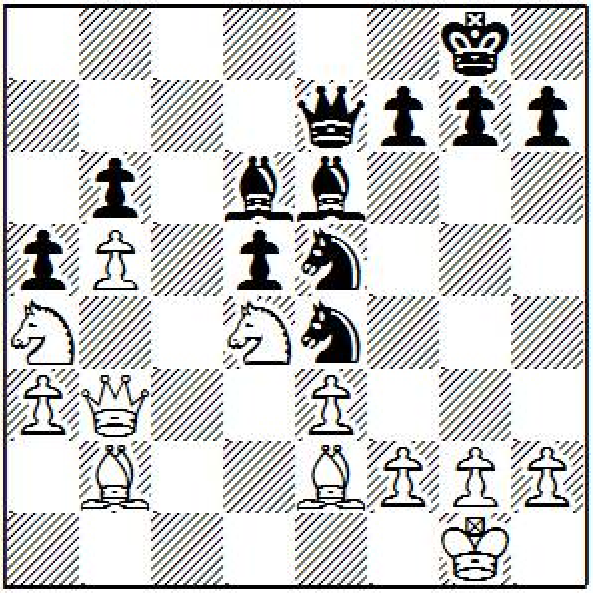
As is easily verified, 17 Nxd5? and 17 Nc6? both lose material.

17 ... Ne5! 18 Be2

And in this position the capture with 18 Bxd5? is well met by 18 ... Rxc3 which is good for Black.

18 ... Qe7 19 Rac1 Rfc8! 20 Na4 Rxc1 21 Rxc1 Rxc1+ 22 Bxc1 Ne4! 23 Bb2

‘I had already seen what was coming, but I also felt sure that my only chance was to weather the storm. Perhaps either 23 f3 or 23 Nxe6 followed by 24 f3 would have held the game, but, at any rate, Black had an advantage.’ (Capablanca) Only not 23 Nxb6? Qc7!



23 ... Nc4! 24 Bxc4

If 24 Nxe6? with even more force there would have followed 24 ... Bxh2+! 25 Kxh2 Qh4+ 26 Kg1 Qxf2+ 27 Kh2 Qg3+ 28 Kh1 Nxe3 winning.

24 ... Bxh2+!

‘The crisis is at hand! With this bishop sacrifice Janowski tears down his opponent’s defences. Incidentally, he gains enough pawns to compensate him for the piece, should Capablanca succeed in getting his king away to safety.’ (Ed. Lasker) ‘This sacrifice is excellent, inasmuch as Black can, at least, draw the game by perpetual check. 24 ... dxc4 would not have been good, because White would then play 25 Qc2 and have, at least, an even game.’ (Capablanca)

25 Kxh2 Qh4+ 26 Kg1 Qxf2+ 27 Kh2 Qg3+!

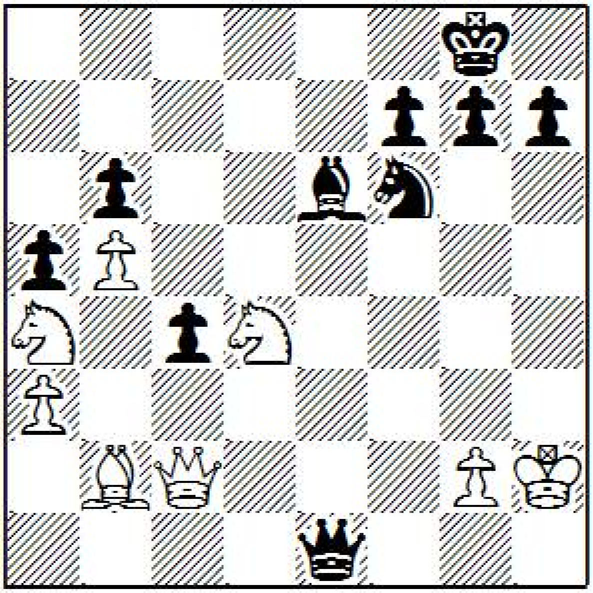
Much less clear was 27 ... dxc4 28 Qc2 Nd2 29 Qd1 Bd5 (29 ... Nf1+ 30 Kh1 Bd5 31 Nf3 Nxe3 32 Qg1!, and there remains only 31 ... Ng3+ 32 Kh2 Nf1+ with perpetual check) 30 Qg4 Nf1+ 31 Kh3 Bb7 32 Nf5 g6 33 Bd4.

28 Kg1 (but not 28 Kh1? Nf2+ 29 Kg1 Bh3 30 Bxd5 Ng4 31 Bxf7+ Kh8) **28 ... dxc4 29 Qc2 Qxe3+ 30 Kh2 Qh6+ 31 Kg1 Qe3+ 32 Kh2 Qg3+**

Checks to gain time on the clock.

33 Kg1 Qe1+ 34 Kh2 Nf6!

An excellent resource – the temporary sacrifice of a second piece!



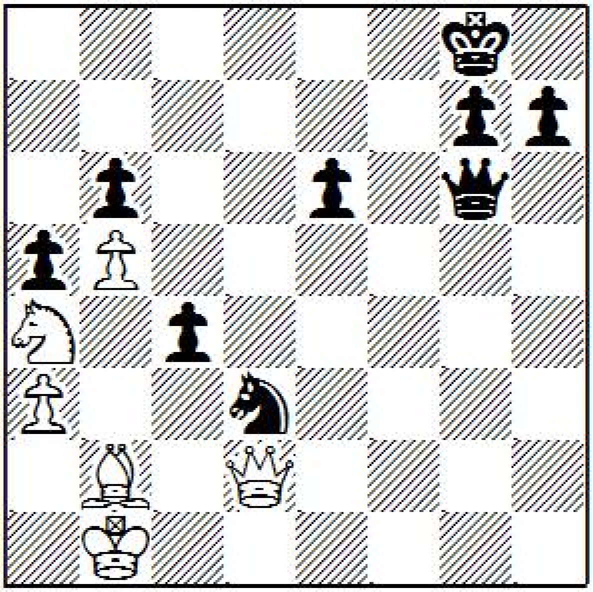
35 Nxe6

In the light of White’s subsequent difficulties, probably more tenacious was a continuation not mentioned by anyone: 35 Qe2!? Ng4+ 36 Kh3 Qh1+ 37 Kg3.

35 ... Qh4+ 36 Kg1 Qe1+ 37 Kh2 Qh4+ 38 Kg1 Ng4 39 Qd2!

The only move. If 39 g3 (39 Qc3?? Qf2+ 40 Kh1 Qf1 mate), then 39 ... Qxg3+ 40 Qg2 Qe1+ 41 Qf1 Qxe6 42 Qf4 h5! etc.

39 ... Qh2+ 40 Kf1 Qh1+ 41 Ke2 Qxg2+ 42 Kd1 Nf2+ 43 Kc2 Qg6+ 44 Kc1 Qg1+ 45 Kc2 Qg6+ 46 Kc1 Nd3+ 47 Kb1 fxe6



48 Qc2

‘In his book *My Chess Career*, Capablanca makes the statement that at this point he could have at least drawn the game with 48 Ka2 [48 Nxb6? Qg1+], but after 48 ... Qf5! White would have been as badly off as in the line which he actually chose.’ (Ed. Lasker) Indeed, after 49 Qe3 Nxb2 50 Nxb2 Qd5 51 Kb1 c3 White’s position is unenviable.

48 ... h5! 49 Bd4

49 Qxc4?! (49 Nxb6? Qg1+ and ... Qxb6) 49 ... h4! 50 Nxb6 (50 Qxh4? Nb4+) 50 ... h3 51 Qc8+ Kh7 52 Nd7 does not work in view of 52 ... Qf5! (but not 52 ... Nc5+? 53 Ka2 Nxd7 54 Qxd7 h2 55 Qd1 drawing) 53 Nf8+ Kh6 54 Nxe6 Nc5+ 55 Ka1 (55 Ka2 Qxe6+!) 55 ... Qf1+ 56 Ka2 Qc4+ 57 Kb1 (57 Ka1 Nb3+) 57 ... Qe4+! 58 Ka1 Qe1+! 59 Ka2 Qxe6+ 60 Qxe6+ Nxe6 61 b6 Nc5 62 Be5 g5 and Black wins.

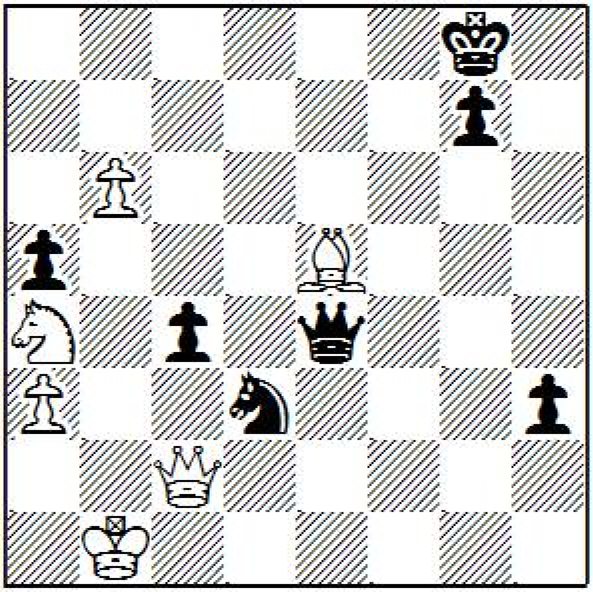
49 ... h4 50 Bxb6 h3 51 Bc7 e5! 52 b6

‘All this from move forty-eight on, is the result of the analysis during adjournment ... It was not good ... Here 52 Qxc4+ Kf8 53 Bd6+ Qxd6 54 Qc8+ and 55 Qxh3 would have given a better chance for a draw.’ (Capablanca) Let us see how much better: 54 ... Ke7! 55 Qxh3 Qxa3 56 Qh4+ Kd7 57 Nb6+ (57 Qh3+ Kd6 or 57 Qg4+ Kd8 58 Qg5+ Qe7) 57 ... Kc7 58 Nd5+ Kb7 with a simple win.

52 ... Qe4!

‘This move I had not properly considered, though it was the only one to win. Against 52 ... Qc6 I had 53 Nc3, and in the same way I believe there would be a defence against any other move.’ (Capablanca)

53 Bxe5



After 53 Nc3 (53 Nb2 h2! 54 Qxh2 Nb4+ 55 Kc1 Na2+) Black would have won with 53 ... h2! 54 Nxe4 (54 Qxh2? Qe1+ 55 Ka2 Qxc3) 54 ... h1Q+ 55 Ka2 Qxe4 56 Kb1! (56 b7? Nb4+!) 56 ... Qd5! followed by ... e5-e4 and ... g7-g5.

53 ... Qe1+??

‘It was a tragedy in Janowski’s life that he did not bring this brilliant game to a fitting conclusion with 53 ... Qh1+!, followed by ... Nxe5 and ... Qg2.’ (Ed. Lasker)

There comes to mind an ancient chess aphorism: lucky, like the first prize winner! ‘Janowski should not, however, be much blamed for it, as previous to this fault he had conducted the game as in the old days, when he was one of the most feared of all the players,’ the happy winner praised his opponent.

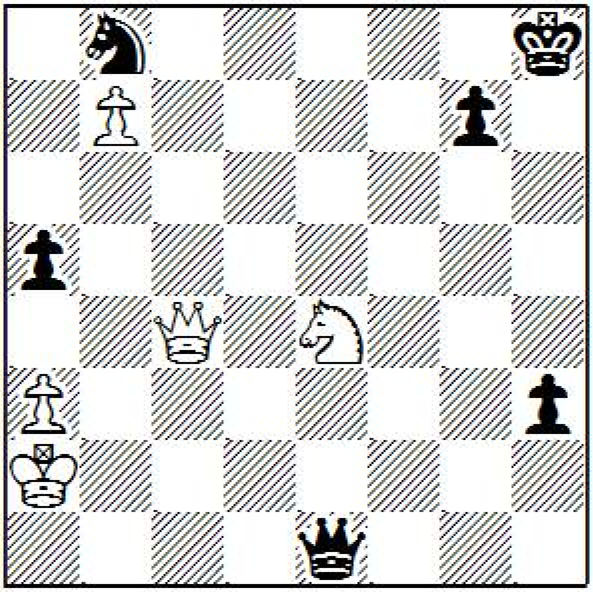
54 Ka2 Nxe5?!

It made sense to force perpetual check – 54 ... Nc1+. But ... ‘Janowski, like the other masters watching the game, never thought that it would be possible for me to obtain more than a draw out of the game ... Before continuing I should add that the endgame coming is perhaps the finest of its kind ever played over the board, and that for some unknown reason it has not been properly appreciated. It is a masterpiece, of which I am very proud.' (Capablanca)

55 b7 Nd7 56 Nc5!

'An all-important move,' writes Capa, prematurely burying his opponent, in my opinion.

56 ... Nb8 57 Qxc4+ Kh8 58 Ne4!



'Black has no check with his queen, nor can the pawn advance, because through a combination of checks I am threatening to win the queen or obtain a similar position to the one that I finally obtained in the game.' (Capablanca) For example: 58 ... h2 59 Qc8+ Kh7 60 Qh3+ Kg8 (60 ... Kg6 61 Qe6+) 61 Qe6+ Kh8 62 Qe8+ Kh7 63 Ng5+!, or 61 ... Kf8 62 Qd6+ Kf7 63 Ng5+ Ke8 64 Qxb8+.

58 ... Kh7?

Only this is the decisive mistake! Two queen moves would have left Janowski with every chance of saving the game:

1) 58 ... Qh4!? 59 Qc8+ Kh7 60 Qf5+ (60 Qxh3+ Qxh3 61 Ng5+ Kg6 62 Nxh3 draws) 60 ... Kh6 (60 ... Kg8!? 61 Qe6+ Kh7 is also unclear) 61 Nd6 g6 62 Qf8+ Kh7 63 Qxb8 Qf2+ 64 Kb3 Qb6+ 65 Kc3 h2 66 Nc4 Qf6+ 67 Ne5 h1Q (even simpler is 67 ... Qb6! 68 Nc4) 68 Qc7+ Kh6 69 b8Q

Qc1+ 70 Kb3 Qe6+ 71 Ka4 Qd1+ 72 Kxa5 Qe1+ 73 Qb4 Q1xe5+ with a draw;

2) 58 ... Qe3!? 59 Qc8+ Kh7 60 Qf5+ Kh6, and 61 Nf2 does not achieve anything in view of 61 ... Qe2+ 62 Kb3 Qe3+ 63 Ka4 (63 Kb2 Qe2+) 63 ... Qd4+ 64 Kb5 (64 Kxa5 Qa7+) 64 ... Qb2+ with perpetual check.

59 Qd3! g6

Black is no longer helped by 59 ... Kg6 (59 ... Kg8 60 Qd5+!) 60 Qd6+ Kf5 61 Qf8+ Kg6 62 Qe8+ Kh6 63 Qe6+ g6 64 Qxh3+, or 59 ... Qh4 60 Ng5+ Kh6 61 Nf7+ Kh5 62 Qf5+ g5 63 Ne5, or 59 ... h2 60 Ng5+ Kh6 61 Nf7+ Kh5 62 Qf5+ Kh4 63 Qf4+ Kh3 64 Ng5+ Kg2 65 Qf3+ Kg1 66 Nh3 mate.

60 Qxh3+ Kg7 61 Qf3 Qc1

No better was 61 ... Qh4 62 Qc3+ or 61 ... Nd7 62 Qd3 Nb8 63 Qd4+.

62 Qf6+ Kh7 63 Qf7+ Kh6 64 Qf8+ Kh5 65 Qh8+ Kg4 66 Qc8+ 1-0

‘The game demonstrates the exceptional tenacity and resourcefulness of the young Capablanca in a difficult defence.’ (Panov)

An exceptionally tense and, in its way, historic encounter. ‘Its outcome,’ wrote the American master Edward Lasker, ‘influenced the fate of three outstanding players. For Janowski the undeserved defeat became the drama of his entire life. After winning this game, Capablanca went on to win the tournament as a whole, thanks to which he became the main contender for the world championship and so raised the prestige of his country in Europe that the Cuban government enlisted him in the diplomatic service, thereby providing him with a comfortable existence to the end of his days. Finally, Rubinstein, who had been regarded as Lasker’s natural successor on the chess throne, who defeated Capablanca in classic style in their individual game and in the end finished only half a point behind him (without a single defeat!), despite all his further successes was overthrown from his proud height.’

I will remind you of the sensational result of San Sebastian 1911: 1. Capablanca – 9½ out of 14; 2-3. Vidmar and Rubinstein – 9; 4. Marshall – 8½; 5-7. Nimzowitsch, Tarrasch and Schlechter – 7½; 8-9. Bernstein and Spielmann – 7; 10. Teichmann – 6½; 11-12. Maróczy and Janowski – 6 etc. The winner later asserted that his success surpassed Pillsbury’s feat at Hastings in 1895, but this is going too far: after all, then Pillsbury finished head of the entire elite, including the world champion Lasker!

Although he lost to Rubinstein (*Game No.64*), Capa won six games, including his eighth-round game against Nimzowitsch, who also, like Bernstein, had objected to the novice's participation in the tournament – and who also, as we will see, became one of Capablanca's 'eternal clients'! Incidentally, in San Sebastian an amusing squabble occurred between them. On one occasion the Cuban could not refrain from making a critical comment while watching a blitz game between Bernstein and Nimzowitsch. In reply the latter advised the young master not to interfere in something that did not concern him. Then Capa invited Nimzowitsch to play some blitz games for a side bet, 'which I won with ridiculous ease, and ended by his retracting the statement he had previously made.'

It soon transpired that in friendly games the Cuban had altogether no equals, and he acquired the firm reputation of being the best blitz player in the world. 'Never before and never since have I seen – and I cannot even imagine,' recalls Alekhine, 'such an amazing rapidity of chess thinking that Capablanca possessed in 1913-14. In blitz games he gave all the St Petersburg players odds of five minutes to one – and he won.'

Instead of a Match – Tours

After his triumph in San Sebastian, Capablanca made a lengthy journey through South America, and then he made an equally long and successful tour of Europe. In late 1911, with the guaranteed support of generous Cuban patrons, he took a decisive step – he sent Lasker an official challenge to a match for the world championship.

Within a few days Lasker replied that in principle he was ready to defend his title, and a further two weeks later he clarified on what conditions: the winner was to be the first to win six games, draws not counting, but with a limit of 30 games; after the 30th game the match was to terminate and the winner would be the player who had a lead of not less than two points, while with an advantage of one point the match would be considered drawn (and the champion would retain his title – a similar rule had already operated in the 1910 Lasker-Schlechter match); the time control was to be 12 moves in an hour, a playing session of not more than five hours a day, with a break after two and a half hours for dinner and rest; the challenger was to secure a prize fund of $10,000 (an unprecedented sum!).

The size of the prize fund suited Capablanca, but he angrily rejected the rest, declaring that Lasker was obliged to defend his title under the conditions as when he had defeated Steinitz (i.e. an unlimited match up to 10 wins), and calling the item about a two-point advantage 'unfair'. Lasker promptly demanded an apology, Capa refused, and negotiations concerning a match came to a standstill.

'Many took Capablanca's side in the dispute, and in my opinion they were completely wrong,' Lasker wrote years later. 'The controversial rule stated that if the score was 1-0, 2-1 or 3-2 after 30 games, the match would be considered drawn. From this, some drew the conclusion that I was gaining a significant advantage, since a draw would leave me with the champion's title. However, the critics did not take account of the fact that the match would be played for a large sum of money, and the aforementioned rule would be valid as regards the division of this sum and was equally advantageous for both sides. And the retention of the title after a 0-1, 1-2 or 2-3 defeat did not have any value for me, unless I were to decisively regain it in a return match. After all, in itself the title of world champion does not give any significant advantages, if it is not acknowledged by the entire chess world, and a champion who does not have the chess world behind him is, in my view, a laughing-stock.' (Who could have imagined that this simple thought would be so topical in the transition between the 20th and 21st centuries!)

It is not for us to judge who was right and who was wrong in this episode. We would comment only that Capablanca himself, on becoming world champion, introduced the 'golden wall' of $10,000, and play to six wins without counting draws, and a drawn match with a score of 5-5 – i.e. the challenger was still obliged to win with an advantage of two points ...

Even so, Lasker should probably have played Capablanca then: the latter was still very inexperienced, whereas the champion was at the height of his powers. Here one can agree with Panov, who wrote that a victory for Lasker in 1912 'would have given him an enormous moral advantage and it would have been extremely difficult for the Cuban to achieve a new match.'

In fact 1912 went down in chess history as the year of Rubinstein, who won, apart from the Russian Championship, three strong international tournaments and gained every right to a match with Lasker. But the champion was not in any hurry to come to an agreement with the 'great Akiba' ...

For a couple of years Capablanca went into hiding, restricting himself to playing in American competitions and making tours of the USA and Cuba. In the summer of 1913 he reminded everyone of his strength with a result of 13/13 in one of the New York tournaments, repeating an achievement by Lasker twenty years before.

At the end of the year he was invited to the international tournament St Petersburg 1914 and he finally set sail for a tour of Europe. ‘I had entered the Cuban Foreign Office (*a pure sinecure, similar to a stipend from the USSR Sports Committee – G. K.*), and was sent to the Consulate at St Petersburg, where I arrived in November of 1913,’ writes Capablanca. ‘Shortly after my arrival a series of six games was arranged: two each against Alekhine, Znosko-Borovsky and Duz-Khotimirsky. I won five, and lost one to Znosko-Borovsky. It was my first defeat, after having won some thirty serious games.’

The Cuban was still playing with his captivating ease and elegance. See how naturally be crushed the ‘threat to the champions’ Fedor Duz-Khotimirsky – the master who had defeated both Lasker and Rubinstein in St Petersburg 1909.

Game 78

J.R.Capablanca-F.Duz-Khotimirsky

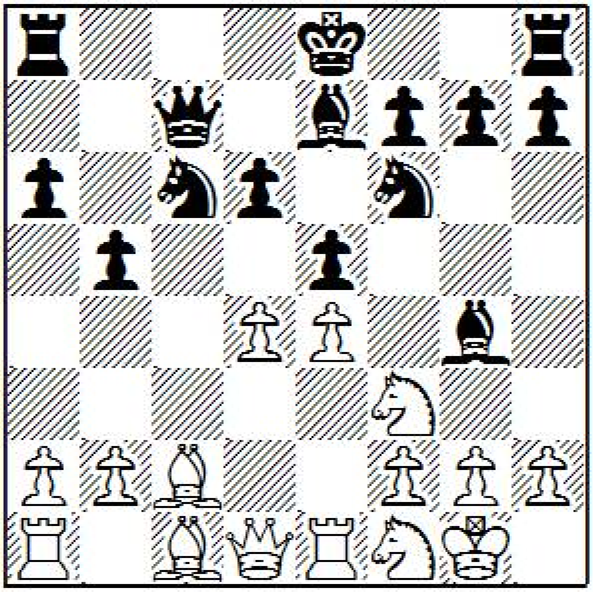
Exhibition game, St Petersburg 1913

Ruy Lopez C90

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 Na5?! (it will be recalled that, at that time, after 8 ... 0-0! they feared 9 d4) **9 Bc2 c5 10 d4 Qc7 11 Nbd2 Nc6 12 Nf1?!** Capa himself later suggested 12 d5! (12 h3 – *Game No.53*).

12 ... cxd4 13 cxd4 Bg4!?

An attempt to seize the initiative. 13 ... exd4 is simpler, for example: 14 Ng3 0-0 15 Ne2 Nb4 16 Bb1 d3 with equality.



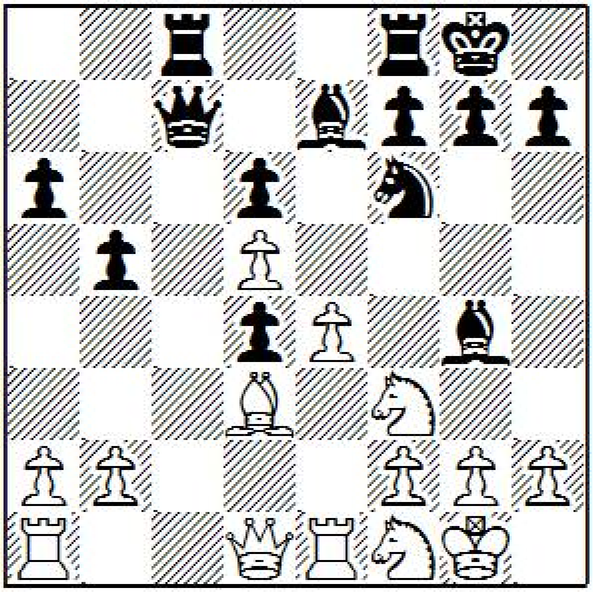
14 d5 Nd4 15 Bd3 0-0

The logical continuation of the chosen course was 15 ... Nh5! 16 Be3 Nxf3+ 17 gxf3 Bd7 18 Ng3 Nf4.

16 Be3 Rac8?!

16 ... Nxf3+ 17 gxf3 Bd7 18 Ng3 was advantageous to White, but 16 ... Rfc8! was more accurate, with a normal position.

17 Bxd4 exd4



18 a4! Qb6 19 axb5 axb5 20 h3! Bxf3

20 ... Bd7 21 Ng3 Rc7 22 Ne2 or 21 ... Ne8 22 Qd2 is advantageous to White.

21 Qxf3 Nd7 22 Rec1! Nc5

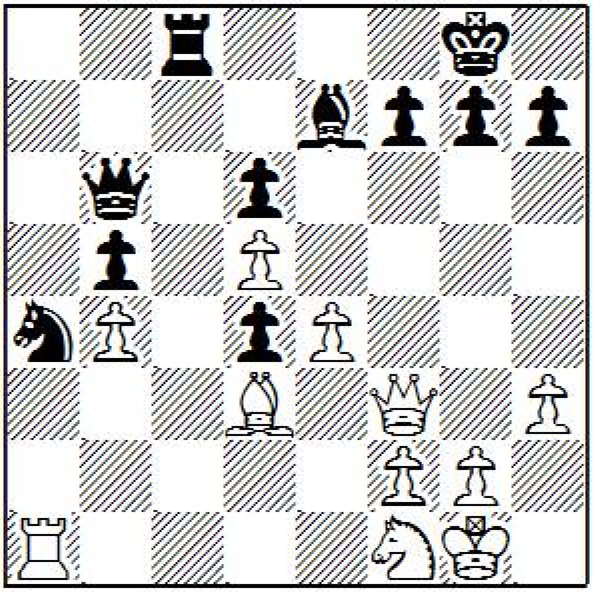
Black is not satisfied with slightly inferior chances after 22 ... Ne5 23 Qe2 Rxc1 24 Rxc1 Bg5 25 Rd1.

23 b4! Na4?

‘Had now Black played 23 ... Nxd3, then 24 Qxd3 Rc3? 25 Rxc3 dxc3 26 Ne3 Bf6 27 Nc2 followed by 28 Ra5, and White has the better game. Probably the best line of play for Black would be 24 ... Bf6.’ (Capablanca) I agree that the sacrifice of the b5-pawn would have led to an unclear game: 25 Rxc8 Rxc8 26 Ra5 Qc7 27 Rxb5 g6 etc.

24 Rxc8 Rxc8

The culminating point of the game.



‘While this game was being played there were present, besides masters of lesser rank, two of the leading players of the world, and they thought that I had allowed my opponent to obtain a winning position. They had not seen my twenty-fifth move, which was to turn the tide of the battle.’ (Capablanca)

25 e5!

The prelude to a series of spectacular combinative blows. Incidentally, I don’t understand why it was thought that Black had a ‘winning position’: even after the dull 25 Ng3 nothing bad for White is apparent.

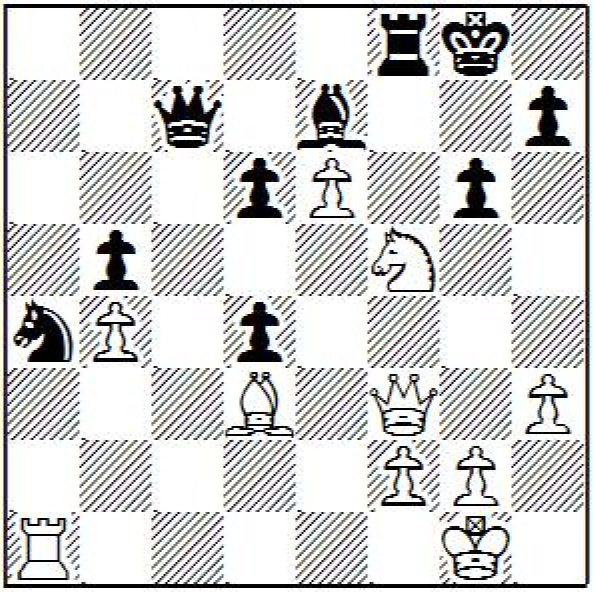
25 ... g6

‘White threatened 26 Qf5. Had Black played 25 ... Rf8, he would later on be forced to play ... g7-g6.’ (Capablanca)

26 e6 Rf8 27 Ng3! Qb7 (if 27 ... fxe6, then 28 Qg4 with the decisive threats of Bxg6 and Qxe6+) **28 Nf5!**

Very pretty!

28 ... fxe6 (this hastens the end, but even after the better 28 ... Kh8 White would have won by 29 Qe4 fxe6 30 Nxe7 Qxe7 31 dxe6) **29 dxe6! Qc7**



30 Qc6!!

An unusually pretty and effortless conception!

30 ... Qd8 31 Nxe7+ Qxe7 32 Bxb5 Nc3 33 Qd7! Qxd7 34 Bxd7 Rb8

No better was 34 ... Nd5 35 Rd1 Rf4 (35 ... Nc3 36 Rd3) 36 g3 Re4 37 Bc6 Re5 38 Rxd4 Ne7 39 Rxd6 winning.

35 e7 Kf7 36 Re1 Re8

Or instead 36 ... d3 37 e8Q+ Rxe8 38 Bxe8+ Kf6 39 Re3 d2 40 Ba4 Nxa4 41 Rd3 and wins.

37 Bxe8+ Kxe8 38 Re6 d5 39 Kf1 Nb5 40 Ke2 Nc7 41 Re5 Na6 42 b5 Nc5 43 b6 d3+ 44 Kd2 Kd7 45 e8Q+ Kd6 46 Qe7+ Kc6 47 Qxc5+ 1-0

During those days Capablanca became friendly with Alekhine, who happily showed his remarkable guest around St Petersburg and discussed various chess topics with him. The Cuban’s performances, especially his simultaneous displays, were a sensational success.

In early 1914 the master visited Moscow, where, apart from five simultaneous displays and three consultation games, he also played two exhibition games with Bernstein. And again he staggered everyone with the simplicity and easiness of his style. After the following quick win he looked at his watch and exclaimed: ‘Excellent! I will still be in time for the ballet!’ And he set off by horse-drawn cab to the Bolshoy Theatre.

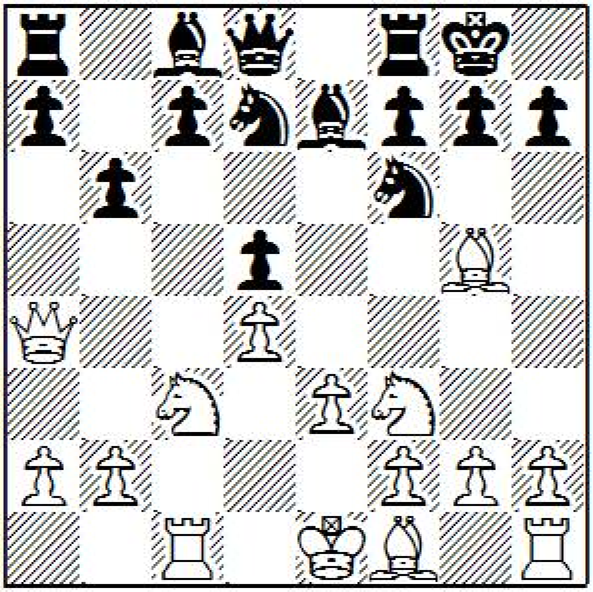
Game 79

O.Bernstein-J.R.Capablanca

Exhibition game, Moscow 1914

Queen's Gambit D63

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 Be7 5 Bg5 0-0 6 e3 Nbd7 7 Rc1 b6 (7 ... c6!) **8 cxd5 exd5 9 Qa4** (9 Bd3!? – *Game No.38*)



9 ... Bb7

It is interesting that in the game Capablanca-Lasker (Havana 5th matchgame 1921) Black preferred the bold 9 ... c5!? 10 Qc6 Rb8 11 Nxd5 Bb7 (11 ... Nxd5!?) with counterplay for the pawn (*Game No.89*).

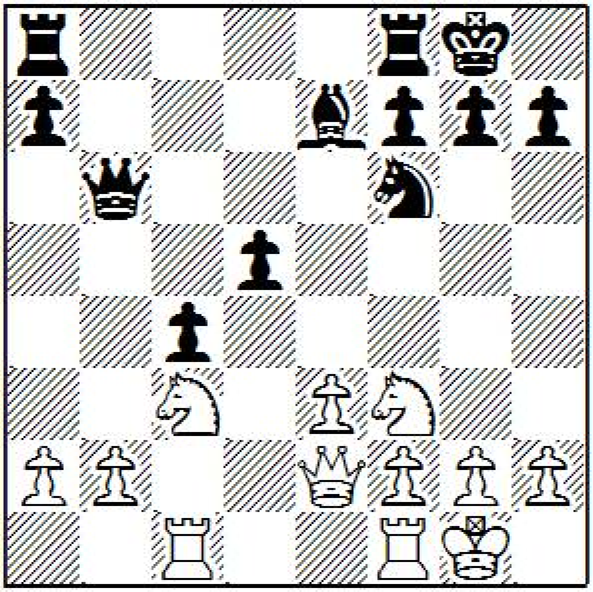
10 Ba6! Bxa6 11 Qxa6 c5?! (11 ... c6! 12 0-0 Qc8! was more solid) **12 Bxf6?**

Instead of this awful move, 12 0-0 suggests itself, with a clear strategic initiative, for example: 12 ... Qc8 13 Qxc8 Rfxc8 14 Ne5 and Black has a rather unpleasant position.

12 ... Nxf6 13 dxc5 bxc5 14 0-0 Qb6 15 Qe2 c4!

Nowadays this is a classic, typical procedure, but then it was a fresh positional idea! ‘All the onlookers, and most annotators, considered this last move of Black’s as weak.’ (Capablanca) And indeed, Black’s hanging pawns are now fixed, the d5-pawn becomes backward and eternally weak, and White gains the d4-square. But this is fully compensated by the pressure on the b2-pawn!

I can give at least two similar examples: Bertok-Fischer (Stockholm interzonal 1962) and Winants-Kasparov (Brussels 1987).



16 Rfd1 Rfd8 17 Nd4

After 17 e4 dxe4 18 Nxe4 (18 Ng5 e3!) 18 ... Nxe4 19 Qxe4 Bf6 20 Qxc4 Qxb2 the resulting position is slightly better for Black, but objectively drawn. In this case Capa would definitely not have made it to the ballet ...

17 ... Bb4!

‘The ultimate object of this move is to play ... Bxc3 at the proper time and force a passed pawn. White makes this task easier by his next move.’ (Capablanca)

18 b3?!

A questionable move: it gives Black a passed pawn, which in the end proves to be not a weakness, but a strength. ‘18 Qc2 and then Nd4-e2-f4 was better.’ (Panov)

18 ... Rac8 19 bxc4 dxc4 20 Rc2 Bxc3 21 Rxc3 Nd5!

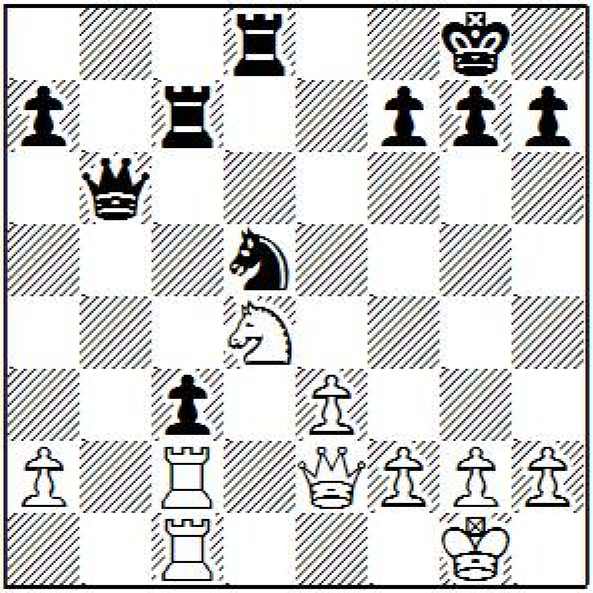
Mini-tactics: 22 Rxc4? is not possible on account of 22 ... Nc3.

22 Rc2 c3

As simply as possible! I am not sure that 22 ... Nf4 23 Qg4 Nd3 would have been better.

23 Rdc1 Rc5 24 Nb3 Rc6 25 Nd4 Rc7!

'Because I had first played 23 ... Rc5, Dr Bernstein was lured into the fatal trap, thinking that I was aiming at the exchange of knights, in order to obtain a free a-pawn.' (Capablanca)



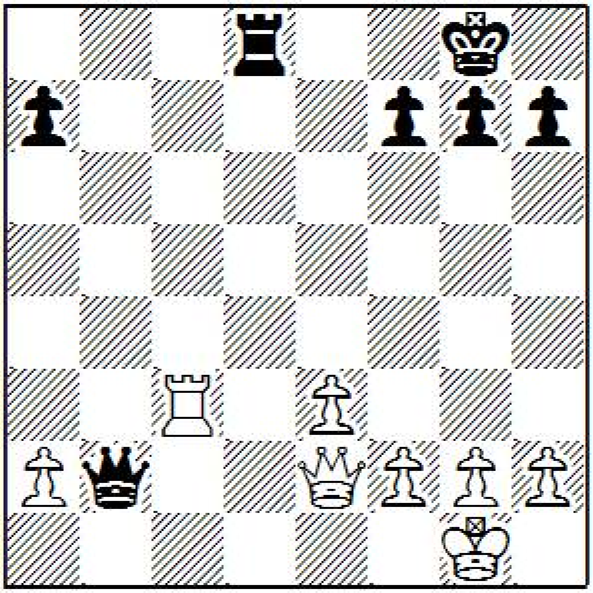
26 Nb5?!

White should simply have made an escape square for his king – 26 h3, and after 26 ... Qb4 27 Qf3 he would probably have been able to restrain the c-pawn.

26 ... Rc5 27 Nxc3??

Bernstein decided to 'make a draw' immediately, although he could still have reconsidered and played 27 Nd4.

27 ... Nxc3 28 Rxc3 Rxc3 29 Rxc3 (expecting 29 ... Qb1+ 30 Qf1 Qxa2 with equality, but ...) **29 ... Qb2!! 0-1**



A queen sacrifice on the theme of diversion – the weakness of the back rank! ‘Simple and – let’s not be afraid to use the word – a stroke of genius.’ (Botvinnik)

Capablanca’s manners and appearance were fully in keeping with the elegance of his play. Friendly and sociable, the brilliance of his expressive, velvety eyes, the dark-golden colour of his handsome face, the black dinner suit with a miniature ivory chrysanthemum in his button-hole ...

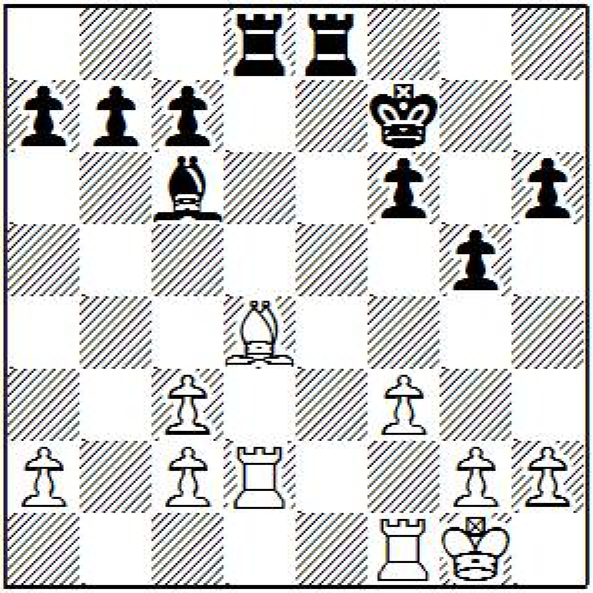
‘In Capablanca’s personal life there is nothing that would allow you to guess that he is a chess master,’ wrote Spielmann. ‘His favourite occupations are politics and diplomacy. In addition, Capablanca likes any kinds of fashionable sports, in particular tennis. In everything else he is an elegant man of the world, although he is free of the accompanying “elegant” vices. He does not smoke, he does not drink, and in general he adheres strictly to the rules of hygiene. He gives the impression of playing chess merely for relaxation, incidentally ... He is unusually impressionable and feels calm only when his opponent is overcome by the superiority of his technique.’

From Moscow Capa set off on a tour of Vienna, Paris and Berlin, also appearing on the way in several Russian towns. In Riga he met his ‘old friend’ Nimzowitsch and defeated him in an instructive ending with opposite-coloured bishops.

Game 80

A.Nimzowitsch-J.R.Capablanca

Exhibition game, Riga 1914



21 g4?

Of course, this plays into Black’s hands, although he also has some advantage after 21 Kf2 Re5 or 21 Rfd1 Rd5.

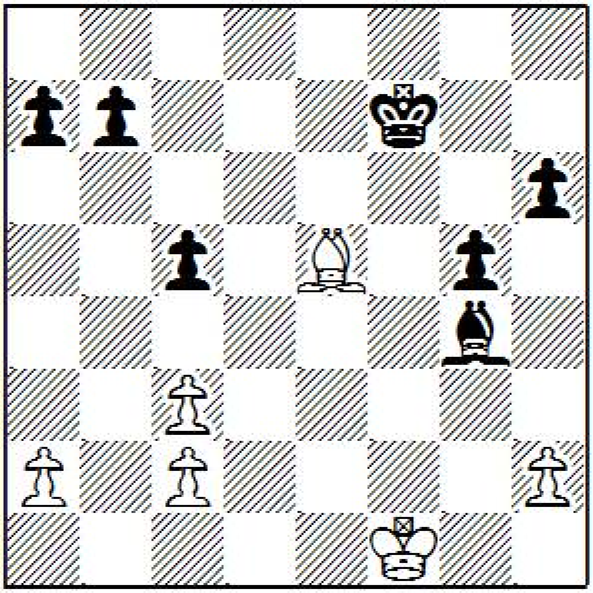
21 ... Bb5 22 Rb1 Ba6 23 Rbd1 (but not 23 Kg2? c5! 24 Be3 Rxd2+ 25 Bxd2 Re2+) **23 ... Re2! 24 Rxe2 Bxe2 25 Re1 Bxf3 26 Rf1 c5!**

‘The move that gives Black the advantage.’ (Capablanca)

27 Bxf6

In the hope of saving himself in the opposite-coloured bishop ending a pawn down. The rook ending after 27 Rxf3 cxd4 28 Rd3 Rc8! is also unpleasant for White, for example: 29 Rxd4 Ke6 30 c4 Rc5 31 c3 Ra5 32 Rd2 Ra4 etc.

27 ... Rd1 28 Be5 Rxf1+ 29 Kxf1 Bxg4



‘The ending is now won by force. Several months after the game was played, Nimzowitsch told me that he had studied the game and that he had finally found a way to draw this ending. Although I had not seen the game since it was played I offered to make him a small sporting bet, giving him the odds of a draw in any position from now on. The offer was immediately accepted and we sat down. In a few moves he saw that his idea was wrong and gave up the game.’ (Capablanca)

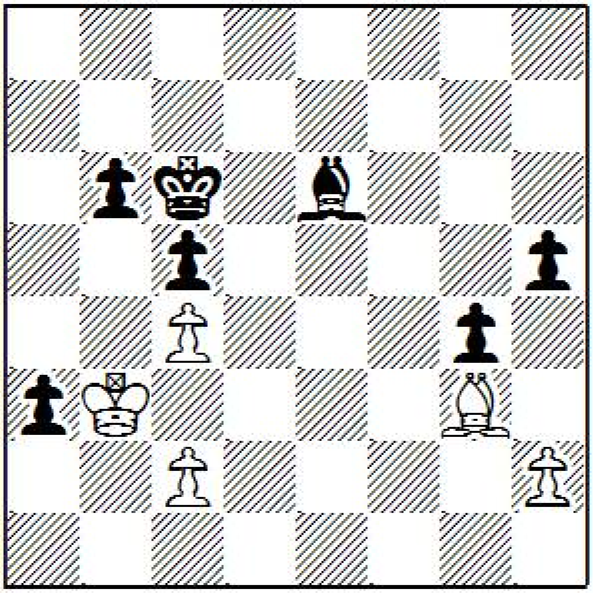
30 a4 Ke6 31 Bb8

After 31 Bg7 h5 32 Ke1 (32 a5 Bd1 and ... Bxc2) there was an equally inevitable win by 32 ... Bf5 33 Kd2 b6!? 34 Bh6 g4 35 Bf4 Kd5 36 Bb8 a5 37 Bc7 Kc6 etc.

31 ... a5! 32 Ke1 (it turns out that if 32 Bc7, then 32 ... b5! is immediately decisive) **32 ... Kd5 33 Kd2 Bd7 34 Bc7 Kc6 35 Bd8**

But not 35 Bxa5? b6 winning the bishop.

35 ... b6 36 c4 Kb7 37 Kc3 Bxa4 38 Kb2 Bd7 39 Kb3 Be6 40 Kc3 a4 41 Kd3 Kc6 42 Kc3 g4 43 Bh4 h5 44 Bg3 a3 45 Kb3



45 ... Bxc4+! 46 Kxa3

If 46 Kxc4, then 46 ... a2 47 Be5 h4 48 Kb3 g3 49 hxg3 h3!, and one of the rook's pawns will queen.

46 ... b5 47 c3 Kd5 48 Bf2 Be2 49 Kb3 Bd1+ 50 Kb2 Kc4 51 Kc1 Bf3 52 Kd2 b4 53 cxb4 cxb4 54 Bh4 Be4 55 Bf6 Bg6 56 Bh4 b3 57 Bf6 h4 58 Ke3 g3 59 hxg3 h3 60 Kf2 Bf5! 61 g4 Bxg4 62 Kg3 Kd3 0-1

63 Kh2 Kc2 64 Kg3 b2. 'This is one of the finest endings I ever played, and I have had very often the great pleasure of hearing my opponent pay tribute to the skill displayed by me in winning it.' (Capablanca)

Again all so easy and simple! For his contemporaries this clarity of Capablanca's style was probably even more staggering than Lasker's magical play: that which Lasker got up to on the board was impossible to explain – whereas here everything was so simple! It was thanks to games such as those with Nimzowitsch, Bernstein, Duz-Khotimirsky, Marshall etc, that rapturous legends grew up around Capablanca and an almost mystical worship developed: that this was a chess machine, and for him there was nothing complicated and inexplicable in the game! An age-old dream of mankind had been realised: all the secrets of chess had been discovered ...

What was at the basis of this phenomenon? The Cuban calmly played classical openings, instantly grasped the essence of the position and then played instinctively, if necessary making brief but accurate calculations, and sometimes also demonstrating deep ideas (such as 15 ... c4! against Bernstein). And this proved quite sufficient to defeat almost all the players in the world!

The paradox is that Capablanca's contribution to the development of chess is much less obvious than that of his contemporary Rubinstein, who was like a modern-day grandmaster, a true innovator, who laid the foundation of modern theory. However, Capablanca's positional insight, his 'little combinations' and his fine technique became essential instructional material for all subsequent generations of players, including, of course, future world champions.

Soon to be Number One

In the spring of 1914 in St Petersburg the most important international tournament of the early 20th century took place. For the first time all three world leaders – Lasker, Rubinstein and Capablanca – came face to face. The idea of the organisers was that they should play three games against one another: first in the preliminary tournament of 11 grandmasters, and then in the final double-cycle 'tournament of five'. The winner, if it was not Lasker, would be declared the official challenger for the world championship.

I have already acquainted you with the unusual formula and the outcome of this historic event in the chapter on Lasker (p.205), but now I should like to show you how Capablanca played in St Petersburg. In the very first round he gave an excellent lesson in positional play to none other than Nimzowitsch!

Game 81

A.Nimzowitsch-J.R.Capablanca

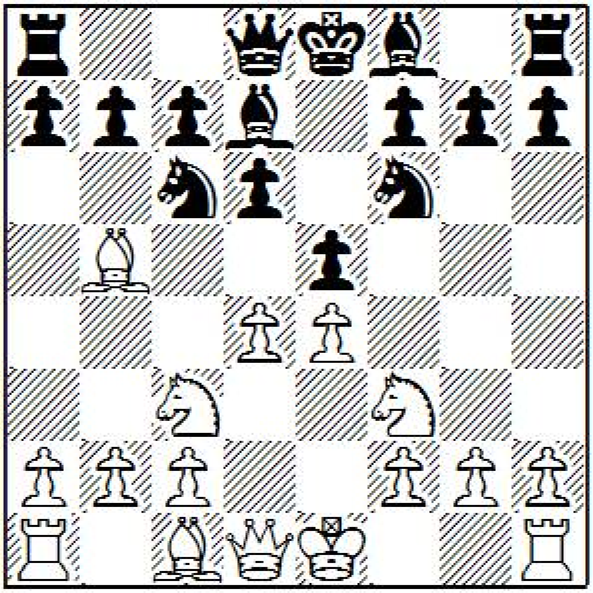
St Petersburg 1914, preliminary tournament

Ruy Lopez C62

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 d6

The fire-proof Steinitz Defence had for a long time been in the Cuban's repertoire, enabling him to avoid unpleasant surprises in the opening. As for the middlegame, Capa was not concerned, being sure that here he would always be able to neutralise the opponent’s initiative.

5 d4 Bd7



6 Bxc6!?

6 0-0 exd4 7 Nxd4 Be7 leads to a *tabiya* of the variation, for example:

1) 8 Nf5?! Bxf5 9 exf5 0-0 10 Re1 Nd7 11 Nd5 Bf6 12 c3 Nb6 with an excellent game for Black (Alekhine-Capablanca, St Petersburg 1914);

2) 8 b3 (both 8 Bg5 and 8 Bf4 have also been tried) 8 ... Nxd4 10 Nxb5 Nd7! 11 Ba3 a6 12 Nc3 Bf6 13 Qe3 (also after 13 Qd2 0-0 14 Rad1 the correct move is 14 ... Bxc3!, but not 14 ... Re8 15 Rfe1 Nb6 16 Bb2 Qd7 17 a4 Qc6 18 a5 Nd7 19 Ba1 Re6 20 Nd5! Tal-Larsen, Bled 2nd matchgame 1965) 13 ... 0-0 14 Rad1 Bxc3! 15 Qxc3 Re8 16 Rfe1 Rc8 17 Qh3 Ne5 18 Bb2 Qg5! with equality (Lasker-Capablanca, New York 1924);

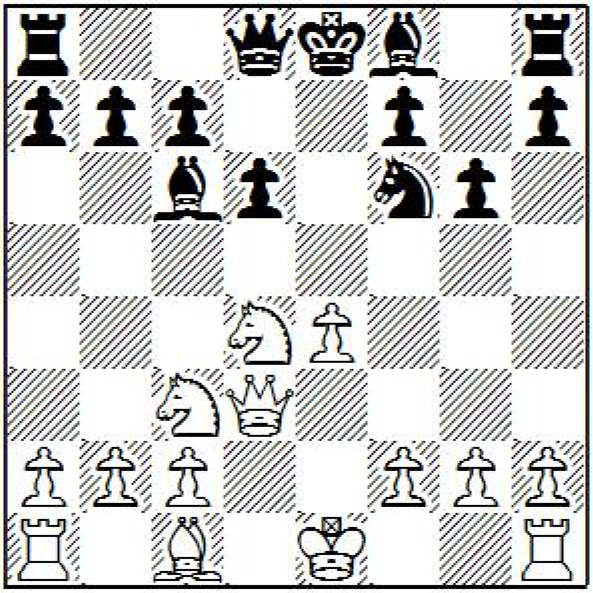
3) 8 Re1 – the most popular continuation (*Game No.54*).

6 ... Bxc6 7 Qd3 exd4 (forced: Black can hardly play 7 ... Qe7?!) **8 Nxd4 g6?!**

‘A novel idea, brought out on the spur of the moment, with the intention of putting White on his own resources and out of the normal forms of this defence with which Nimzowitsch is very familiar.’ (Capablanca)

In those days the usual move was Steinitz’s 8 ... Bd7 – in the opinion of Keres, ‘undoubtedly best: although after 9 Bg5 Be7 10 0-0-0 0-0 11 f4

Ne8 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Nd5 Qd8 14 g4 (Spielmann-Maróczy, Gothenburg 1920) White has a strong attacking position, things for Black are by no means hopeless.’ A later try was 8 ... Be7!? 9 Nf5 (Tal-I. Zaitsev, 37th USSR Championship, Moscow 1969).



Capablanca has embarked on a risky venture, which also involves the sacrifice of a pawn. And Nimzowitsch is unable to resist the temptation.

9 Nxc6?!

Only the exact Alekhine plan with 9 Bg5! Bg7 10 0-0-0 justifies the exchange of the ‘Spanish’ bishop, for example: 10 ... Qd7 (10 ... Qc8!?) 11 h3! 0-0 12 Rhe1 Rfe8?! (12 ... Kh8 13 f4!) 13 Qf3! Nh5 14 g4 with a very strong initiative (Alekhine-Brinckmann, Kecskemet 1927). Even worse is 10 ... 0-0? 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 e5! dxe5 13 Qf3! Qe7 14 Ne4, or 10 ... h6 11 Bh4 0-0 12 f4 Re8?, after which the computer instantly produces 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 e5! dxe5 15 Qxd8 Rexd8 16 Rxd8+ Rxd8 17 fxe5 winning.

However, 9 Bg5! is already the next step forward in the comprehension of chess. It would probably also have been played intuitively by Morphy, and so Alekhine’s discovery can well be regarded as a creative development of his idea.

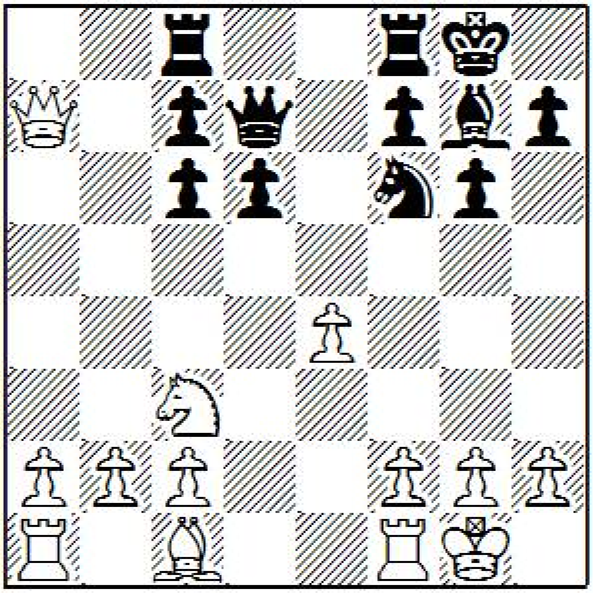
9 ... bxc6 10 Qa6 Qd7

10 ... c5? will not do in view of 11 Qc6+ Nd7 12 Bg5! ‘with a good attack for White’. (Tarrasch) For example: 12 ... Be7 13 Bxe7 Kxe7 14

Nd5+ Kf8 15 Nxc7 Rc8 16 Qxd6+ Kg7 17 Nd5 winning.

11 Qb7 Rc8 12 Qxa7 Bg7 13 0-0 0-0

It appears that White is simply a healthy pawn to the good: after all, Black has no obvious threats.



14 Qa6?!

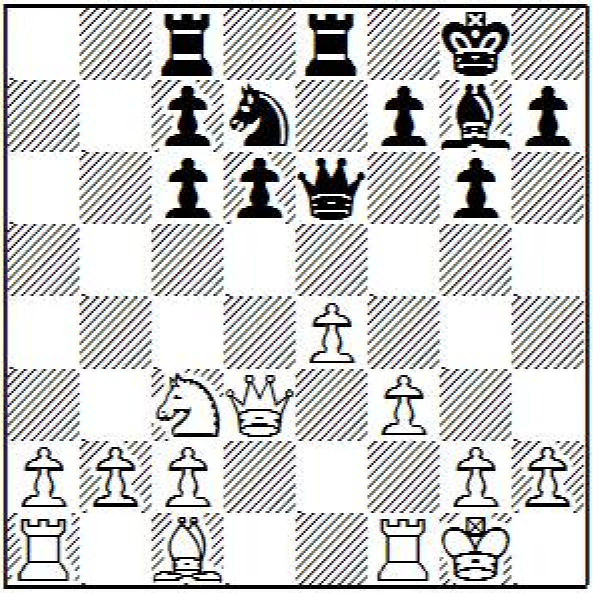
A waste of a tempo. Tarrasch suggested 14 Bd2!, to answer 14 ... Rfe8 or 14 ... Qe6 with 15 f3 and when convenient Qf2, and he doubted whether Black had compensation for the pawn.

But this did not disturb Capablanca: ‘Black is a pawn behind, but all his forces are now deployed and ready for manoeuvring, while White, who had to make three moves with his queen in order to win a pawn, is therefore very backward in his development. Nimzowitsch, it is true, does not make the best moves now, but I believe he has been unjustly criticised for losing this game, although none of the critics have given a satisfactory line of procedure. They have all suggested moves here and there; but the games of the great masters are not played by single moves, but must be played by concerted plans of attack and defence, and these they have not given.’

Well, let’s support Tarrasch’s idea with a concrete plan: b2-b3, a2-a4 and Rad1, and if ... c6-c5, then the queen escapes via a6 and the black knight has to guard the d5-square. Of course, here too Black retains some compensation for the pawn, but it would have been harder for him to demonstrate that he was right.

We can hardly reproach Nimzowitsch for underestimating his opponent’s very deep positional idea, an amazing one for the early 20th century. The typical intuitive insight of a genius! Today, in the era of the Benko Gambit, everyone knows that in such instances the pressure of the rooks on the a- and b-files, supported by the powerful bishop on g7, together with pressure on the centre, promises Black long-term counterplay. But at that time this was a revelation ...

14 ... Rfe8 15 Qd3 (already the sixth move by the queen!) **15 ... Qe6! 16 f3 Nd7!**



After the rapid advance ... Ne5-c4 White’s queenside will be on the point of collapse. Now it is clear that Black has gained excellent compensation for the pawn.

17 Bd2?

Nimzowitsch does not sense the mounting danger. 17 Bf4 was correct, to eliminate the knight after 17 ... Ne5: 18 Bxe5 Bxe5 19 Rab1. With such a bishop Black will now definitely never lose, but we are trying to solve another problem: how not to lose with White ...

17 ... Ne5 18 Qe2 Nc4

After giving up a pawn just like that, Capa plays as though nothing has happened, strengthening his position as much as possible. His ‘simple’ manoeuvres ... Qd7-e6 and ... Nd7-e5-c4 followed by the deployment of the rooks on the a- and b-files are, in my view, staggering for the level of chess at that time.

19 Rab1 Ra8 20 a4?

Little is changed by 20 b3?! Nxd2 21 Qxd2 Ra3! (but not immediately 21 ... Qe5? because of 22 Na4!), and after 22 ... Qe5 Black regains the pawn, retaining his powerful bishop. But 20 Be1 was much better, although after 20 ... d5! 21 b3 Nd6 22 a4 f5 Black has a comfortable and active game.

20 ... Nxd2 21 Qxd2 Qc4! 22 Rfd1

After 22 Ne2 Rxa4 23 b3 Qc5+ 24 Kh1 Ra2 25 Rbc1 White would have faced an equally depressing defence.

22 ... Reb8!

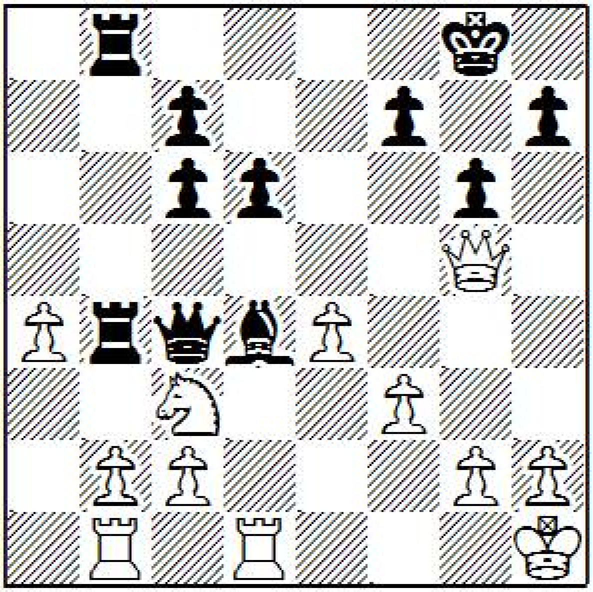
With the threat of ... Rxb2! Of course, Black ignores the possibility of regaining the pawn at the cost of the exchange of his fine bishop: 22 ... Bxc3 23 Qxc3 Qxc3 24 bxc3 Rxa4 with drawing motifs in the double-rook ending.

23 Qe3?

The Cuban’s play has paralysed Nimzowitsch’s will! Only 23 Qd3 Qc5+ 24 Kh1 Rb4 25 Ne2 would have retained any chances of saving the game.

23 ... Rb4! 24 Qg5 (now 24 Qd3 is too late: 24 ... Qc5+ 25 Kh1 Rab8 etc.) **24 ... Bd4+ 25 Kh1 Rab8**

The triumph of Black’s innovatory strategy: the destruction of White’s queenside is inevitable! The threat of 26 ... Bxc3 forces White to give up the exchange. However, this terrible bishop is worth a rook ...



26 Rxd4 Qxd4 27 Rd1 Qc4 28 h4 Rxb2 29 Qd2 Qc5

The conversion of the advantage does not present any difficulty for such a ‘technician’ as Capablanca.

30 Re1? (even so, 30 Ra1 was more tenacious) **30 ... Qh5! 31 Ra1**

Avoiding a transparent trap: 31 Qf2? Rxc2!

31 ... Qxh4+ 32 Kg1 Qh5 33 a5 Ra8 34 a6 Qc5+ 35 Kh1 Qc4 36 a7 Qc5 37 e5 Qxe5 38 Ra4 Qh5+ 39 Kg1 Qc5+ 40 Kh2 d5!?

‘Destroying White’s last hope: 40 ... Rxa7? 41 Ne4! Qb6 42 Qh6.’ (Panov)

There is no doubt that in such positions a good player will always aim to avoid unnecessary complications. But in the given instance after 40 ... Rxa7! 41 Ne4 there weren’t any – instead of the cooperative 41 ... Qb6?? our ‘iron friend’ Fritz indicates three ways to win:

1) 41 ... Qe5+ 42 f4 Qe7!, and to avoid 43 Rxa7 Qh4+ 44 Kg1 Rb1+ 45 Qd1 Rxd1 mate, White has to give up his rook;

2) 41 ... Qh5+ 42 Kg3 (42 Kg1 Rb1+ 43 Kf2 Qh4+) 42 ... Qe5+ 43 f4 Rxa4! 44 fxe5 Rxe4;

3) 41 ... Rxc2 42 Qh6 (or 42 Nxc5 Rxd2 43 Rxa7 dxc5 44 Rxc7 Rd6) 42 ... Qe5+ 43 f4 Rxa4! 44 fxe5 Rxe4 etc.

41 Rh4 Rxa7 42 Nd1 0-1

Without waiting for his opponent’s reply, White resigned. ‘One of Capablanca’s classic games. The sacrifice of the a-pawn in similar positions followed by the attack on the opponent’s pawns along the a- and b-files has been adopted by many masters.’ (Botvinnik)

Before the start the Cuban quite reasonably named Rubinstein as the main favourite, saying that he ‘is in excellent health, and has prepared for this tournament for a long time,’ whereas the world champion Lasker ‘is uncertain, because he is a little out of practice,’ and about himself ‘my health just now is not very good, and I will be satisfied if I finish second.’

In the third round the two contenders for the crown met in a nerve-racking confrontation, the outcome of which had an enormous influence on their subsequent fates.

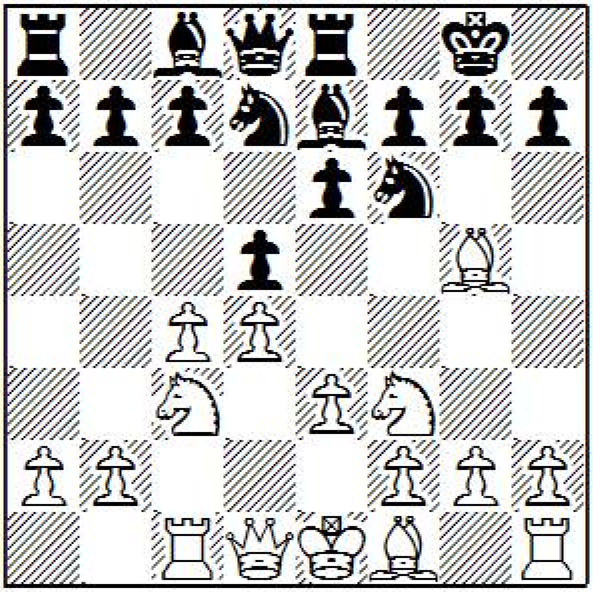
Game 82

A.Rubinstein-J.R.Capablanca

St Petersburg 1914, preliminary tournament

Queen’s Gambit D63

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 c4 e6 4 Nc3 Nbd7 5 Bg5 Be7 (5 ... c6!? 6 e3 Qa5) **6 e3 0-0 7 Rc1 Re8?!**



Fashionable at that time, but not the most accurate move. At that time the theory of the Queen’s Gambit was only just being developed, and it was possibly this game that suggested to Capablanca the idea of the relieving variation 7 ... c6 8 Bd3 dxc4 9 Bxc4 Nd5 etc.

8 Qc2!?

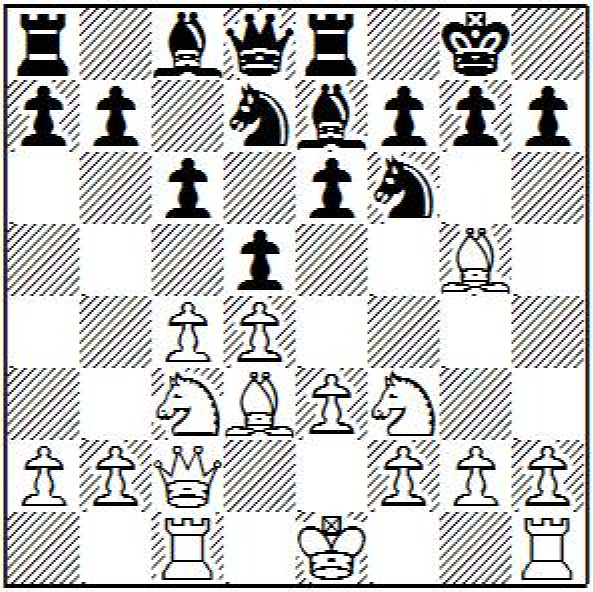
This is more useful than 8 a3 a6! (Janowski, Rubinstein) or 8 Bd3 dxc4 9 Bxc4 a6! 10 0-0 b5 11 Bd3 Bb7 12 Qe2 c5, which was also introduced by Janowski (1908), and then also employed by Rubinstein, along with 9 ... c5 10 0-0 a6!

8 ... c6

Here are some later tries: 8 ... dxc4 9 Bxc4 c5 10 0-0 cxd4 11 Nxd4 a6 12 Rfd1 Qa5 13 Bh4 Ne5 14 Be2 with some advantage (Rubinstein-Maróczy, Gothenburg 1920), or 8 ... h6!? 9 Bh4 c5 10 cxd5 Nxd5 11 Bxe7 Nxe7 12 dxc5 Nxc5 13 Bb5 Bd7 with a rapid draw (Capablanca-Lasker, Havana 13th matchgame 1921).

9 Bd3

But here 9 a3!? makes a lot of sense: 9 ... dxc4 (9 ... h6 10 Bf4!?) 10 Bxc4 Nd5 (inferior is 10 ... b5?! 11 Ba2! a6 12 Bb1 h6 13 Bxf6 Nxf6 14 Ne4) 11 Bxe7 Qxe7 12 Ne4 (12 Ne2 has also been played) 12 ... N5f6 (12 ... h6?! 13 0-0 b6 14 Ba2 Bb7 15 Bb1 N5f6 16 Ng3 g6 17 e4 Smyslov-Hort, Leipzig Olympiad 1960) 13 Ng3 c5 14 0-0 cxd4 15 Nxd4 Nb6 16 Ba2 with some advantage (Euwe-Lasker, Zurich 1934). Evidently the waiting move 9 ... a6!? is more solid.



9 ... dxc4?!

Capa follows Bernstein's plan, employed a couple of months earlier in one of the exhibition games in Moscow. However, it was worth eliminating the attack on the h7-pawn by 9 ... h6, and if 10 Bh4, then 10 ... dxc4. True, here Black has to reckon with 10 Bf4!? – after 10 ... dxc4 11 Bxc4 Nd5 12 0-0 Nxf4 13 exf4 White retains the initiative.

10 Bxc4 b5?!

Also in White's favour is 10 ... a6 (10 ... h6 11 Bf4!?) 11 0-0 b5 12 Bd3 c5 13 Bxf6 Nxf6 14 dxc5 Bxc5 15 Ne4. The lesser evil looks to be 10 ... Nd5, as Lasker played in the 11th game of the 1921 match (*Game No.91*), or even 10 ... c5.

11 Bd3 a6?!

Even after the comparatively better 11 ... Bb7 12 0-0! (12 Ne5 Nxe5 13 dxe5 Nd7 14 Bxe7 Qxe7 15 Bxh7+ Kh8 16 Be4 Nxe5 17 Qe2 Kg8 is less clear) Black has a difficult position: 12 ... Qa5?! 13 Ne5 Nf8 14 Ne4! Qxa2 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Nxf7! wins for White, 12 ... h6 13 Bxf6 Nxf6 14 Ne4 and the bishop at b7 is shut in, or 12 ... a6 13 Ne5 c5 14 Nxd7 Qxd7 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 dxc5 etc.

12 Ne5!

‘This move disrupts all Black’s plans.’ (Tarrasch) The modest 12 0-0 Bb7 13 Ne5 was also quite good, transposing into the previous variation.

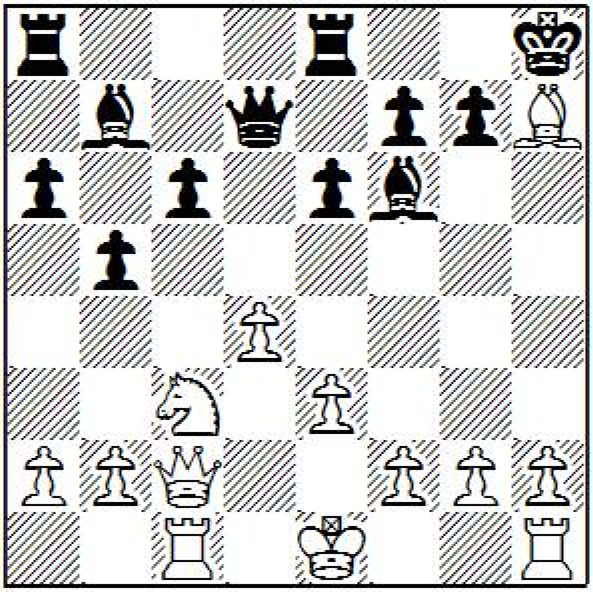
12 ... Bb7

If 12 ... Qb6 (12 ... c5?! 13 Nc6 Qb6 14 Nxe7+ Rxe7 15 Bxh7+) there can follow 13 Nxd7 Bxd7 14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 Bxh7+ Kg7 16 Be4! (16 Bd3?! c5! Ed. Lasker-Hodges, New York 1915), or 13 Bxf6! Nxf6 (13 ... Bxf6 14 Bxh7+; 13 ... gxf6 14 Bxh7+ Kg7 15 Nxc6! f5 16 Bxf5 exf5 17 Nd5) 14 Ne4 and Black loses material.

And if 12 ... Nxe5 13 dxe5 Nd7 14 Bxh7+ Kh8, then 15 Bxe7! (but not 15 Bf4 g6 16 Bxg6 fxg6 17 Qxg6 Nf8 18 Qh5+ Nh7) 15 ... Qxe7 16 Be4 Nxe5 17 Qe2 f5 18 f4! with a powerful initiative.

13 Nxd7 Qxd7 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Bxh7+ Kh8

A critical position. White is a healthy pawn to the good, and he has to choose a plan for converting his advantage.



16 Be4?

‘The advantage could have been retained only by a sharp attack on the king – 16 Ne4! Be7 17 h4!’ (Tarrasch) Yes, the sharp advance of the h-pawn looks not at all bad: if 17 ... Rac8, then 18 Nc5! Bxc5 19 dxc5 with a complete bind, since after 19 ... g6?! White has a forced win by 20 h5! Kxh7 21 hxg6+ Kg8 22 Rh7 Re7 23 Rd1! Qc7 24 gxf7+ Rxf7 25 Qg6+.

Or 17 ... Bb4+ 18 Kf1 e5 19 Nc5! (the idea of blocking in the b7-bishop is so good, that I do not even analyse 19 Ng5!?) 19 ... Bxc5 20 dxc5 (20 Bf5?! Qd5 21 dxc5 allows the chance 21 ... e4 22 Bg4 Bc8!), and again after 20 ... g6?! 21 h5! Kxh7 22 hxg6+ Kg8 23 Rd1! there is no way of saving the game: 23 ... Qe6 (23 ... Qc7 24 Qf5!) 24 Rd6 Qxa2 (24 ... Qc4+ 25 Qxc4 bxc4 26 gxf7+ Kxf7 27 Rh7+) 25 Qf5 Qc4+ 26 Ke1 Qb4+ 27 Rd2 winning.

I should add that White would also have retained the advantage by 16 Bd3!? e5 17 Ne4! (in my opinion, this is stronger than 17 dxe5 and Ne4) 17 ... exd4 18 Nxf6 gxf6 19 Qe2 (19 0-0 dxe3 20 fxe3 Rxe3 21 Rcd1 is less clear) 19 ... Qd5 20 0-0 c5 21 e4, or 17 ... Be7 18 Nc5 Bxc5 19 dxc5 Qd5 20 Be4 Qxa2 21 0-0 and again Black is ‘a bishop down’.

The nature of Rubinstein’s mistake can be explained: after quickly gaining a winning position and afraid of squandering his advantage, he decided to operate with purely technical means, without any risk – and he moved his bishop from h7, so as not to have to calculate the ‘sharp’ variations with ... g7-g6. Moreover, the retreat to e4 looks logical: the long diagonal! Playing against any other opponent (apart perhaps from Lasker), Rubinstein would most probably have converted his pawn advantage. But Capablanca makes things as difficult as possible for White, and puts up a desperate resistance.

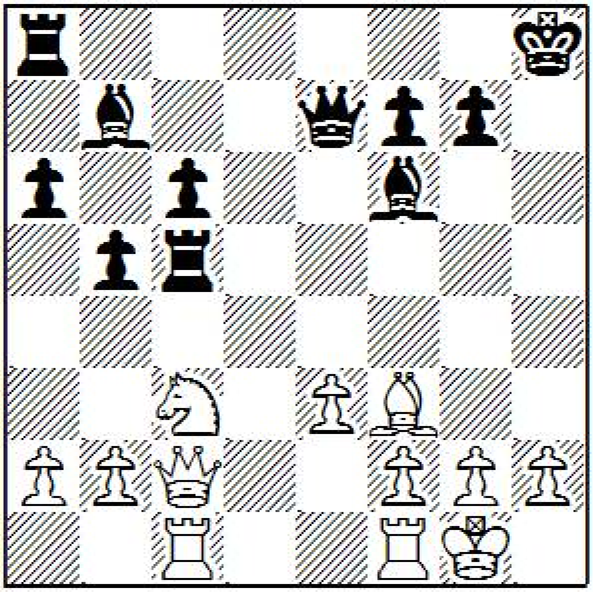
16 ... e5

16 ... c5!? comes into consideration. In a game between two little-known German players (Seitz-Sprecher, Berlin 1920) Black equalised after 17 Bxb7 (17 dxc5 Bxc3+ 18 bxc3 Rac8 19 0-0 Bxe4 20 Qxe4 Rxc5 or 19 Rd1 Bxe4 20 Qxe4 Qc6 with drawing chances) 17 ... Qxb7 18 Qe4 Qxe4 19 Nxe4 cxd4 20 Nxf6 gxf6 21 exd4 Red8 22 Ke2 Rxd4. I would have preferred 18 Ne4!? cxd4 19 Nxf6 gxf6 20 0-0 with the initiative, but with no guarantee of success.

17 dxe5 Rxe5!

By activating his rook, Black gains some compensation for the pawn. After 17 ... Bxe5?! 18 Rd1 Qe7 19 Bf3 c5 20 Bxb7 Qxb7 21 0-0 White has a ‘free ride’.

18 0-0 Qe7 (with the threat of 19 ... b4) **19 Bf3 Rc5!**



20 Qe2

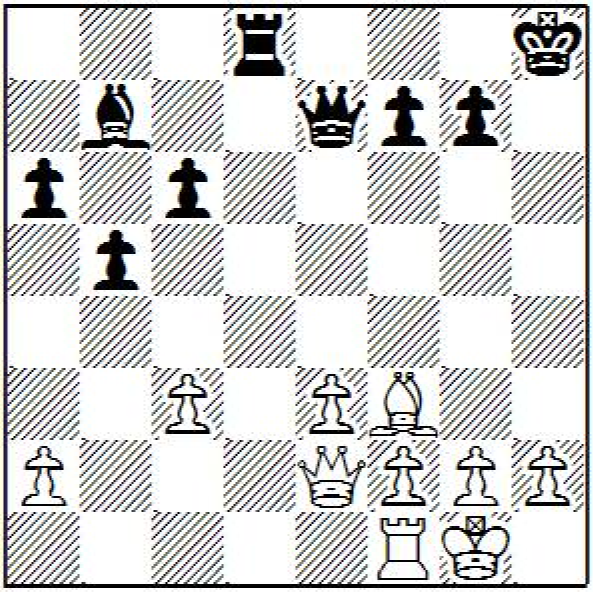
20 Qb3!? a5 21 Rfd1 Rc4 is interesting. Although the commentators give here a ‘with counterplay’ sign, after 22 Rd2! a4 (22 ... Bc8 23 Qd1!) 23 Qd1 the threat of Rd7 sets Black unpleasant problems: 23 ... a3 (23 ... Bc8? 24 Nxb5) 24 bxa3! Bxc3 25 Rd7 Qf6 26 Rxb7 Rxa3 27 Rd7 etc.

20 ... Bxc3 21 Rxc3?!

Now 21 bxc3! was simply essential. Some criticised this because of 21 ... Bc8 22 Rfd1 Be6, but after 23 Rd4! and Qd2 White seizes control of the d-file and can calmly begin an attack: the c3-pawn is inaccessible to Black, and it is unfavourable for him to exchange on d4 – in short, the position is a technical one.

Therefore 21 ... Qf6! is better, when 22 Rfd1!? Rxc3 23 Rxc3 Qxc3 24 Be4 is tempting, with an attack in a position with equal material. But in order to win here, considerable effort and inventiveness are required of White, and this is precisely what Rubinstein was aiming to avoid! He tried everything possible to simplify the position and in the end he overdid it: too many pieces were whisked off the board sooner that they should have been ...

21 ... Rxc3 22 bxc3 Rd8

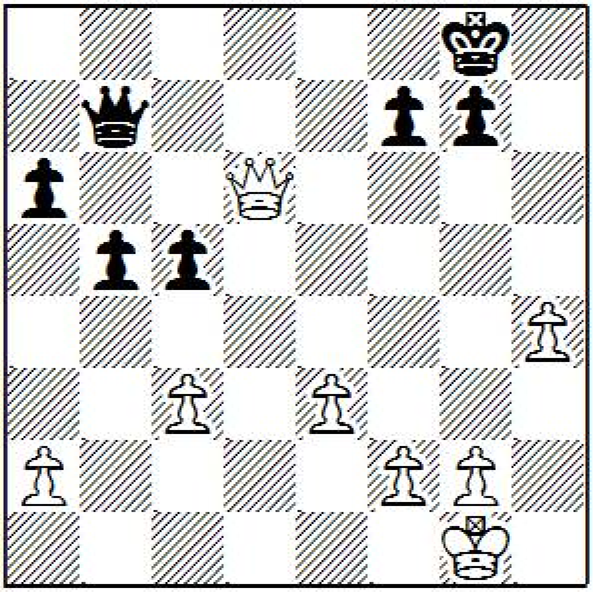


23 Rd1

‘White has nothing else. He cannot leave his opponent with the only open file.’ (Tarrasch) Apparently Rubinstein was hoping to win the queen endgame, but from afar he underestimated the resulting problems. It would very much appear that the win has already been finally missed.

23 ... Rxd1+ 24 Qxd1 Kg8 25 h4 c5 (but not 25 ... Qxh4? 26 Qd7 winning the bishop) **26 Bxb7 Qxb7 27 Qd6**

27 Qd8+ Kh7 28 Qd3+ Kg8 would also have hardly promised anything.



‘The queen endgame is very favourable for White. Firstly, he is a pawn up, but this is not the main thing. It is well known that in queen endgames, passed pawns are especially important. A strong passed pawn is usually able to neutralise even a big material advantage. Secondly, White’s queen is more active than Black’s and it controls most of the important central squares. Thirdly, the position of the white king is more secure. How then should Black continue in this difficult situation?’ (Keres)

27 ... b4!

This is how: it is much easier for Black to create a passed pawn than White. 27 ... c4? was bad because of 28 f3! b4 (28 ... a5? 29 Qd8+; 28 ... Kh7 29 a3!) 29 cxb4 Qc8 30 Qd2 c3 31 Qc2 Qc4 32 a3 (Keres). Also dubious was the passive 27 ... Qc8?! 28 e4 Kh7 29 f3 Kg8 30 Kf2 Kh7 31 g4 etc.

28 Qxc5?

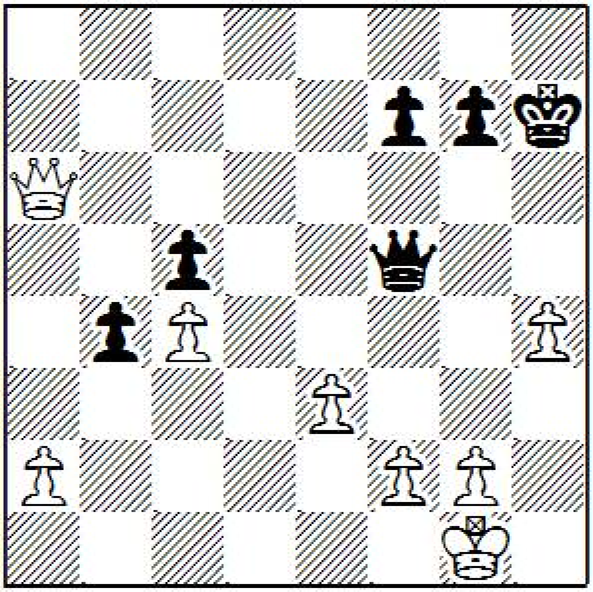
The final mistake, leading to a rapid draw. But what should White do? If 28 cxb4, then 28 ... Qxb4! (inferior is 28 ... cxb4?! 29 Qc5! Qe4 30 Qc8+ Kh7 31 Qxa6 Qxh4) 29 Qxa6 c4, and the strong passed c-pawn saves Black, for example: 30 Qa8+ Kh7 31 Qe4+ Kg8 32 Qe8+ Kh7 33 Qxf7 c3.

Tarrasch in the tournament book, and later Keres in the magazine *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (1964 No.3 – for an English translation cf. *The Art of the Middlegame* by Keres and Kotov [Penguin 1964]) recommended 28 c4! as the best chance. And indeed, now both 28 ... a5? 29 Qd8+ Kh7 30 Qxa5 and 28 ... b3? 29 axb3 Qxb3 30 Qxa6 are bad. But Black has other ways of defending:

1) 28 ... Qe4?! 29 Qxc5! (after 29 Qxa6 Kh7! it is not apparent how White can strengthen his position) 29 ... Qb1+ 30 Kh2 Qxa2 31 Qxb4 Qxf2 32 Qe7, ‘and the c-pawn cannot be stopped.’ (Keres) Let us check this: 32 ... f6 33 Qe4! (but not 33 Kh3?! Qf5+ 34 Kg3 Kh7 35 c5 Qg6+ drawing) 33 ... f5 34 Qe7 f4 35 Qe8+ Kh7 36 Qe4+ Kg8 37 exf4 Qxh4+ 38 Kg1 with winning chances;

2) 28 ... Qa7!? 29 g4 (29 Qd8+ Kh7 30 Qa5 Qe7! 31 Qxa6 Qe4 – the same as after 29 Qxa6 Kh7! in the first variation) 29 ... a5 30 h5 a4 31 g5 b3 32 g6 Qa8 33 axb3 a3, repelling the attack: 34 gxf7+ (but not 34 Qd7?? a2! 35 gxf7+ Kf8 winning) 34 ... Kxf7 35 Qg6+ Kg8 36 h6 Qa7 with a level position;

3) 28 ... Qc8!? (with the threat of 29 ... a5) 29 Qb6 Qf5! (29 ... Kh7? 30 e4!) 30 Qxa6 Kh7!



Analysis diagram

‘The conversion of the two extra pawns is very difficult,’ writes Keres, and he gives these variations:

a) 31 Qa4 Qb1+ 32 Kh2 Qf5 or 32 ... Qb2!?, and it is not apparent how White can conveniently defend the f2-pawn;

b) 31 Qa5 Qe5! (threatening 32 ... Qa1+ and 33 ... b3) 32 Qa4 Qa1+ 33 Kh2 Qb2, transposing into a position that has already been examined; I should like to add 32 Qa8 Qa1+! 33 Kh2 Qe5+ 34 g3 Qe6 with adequate counterplay (35 Qd5?? Qxd5 36 cxd5 Kg8 wins for Black);

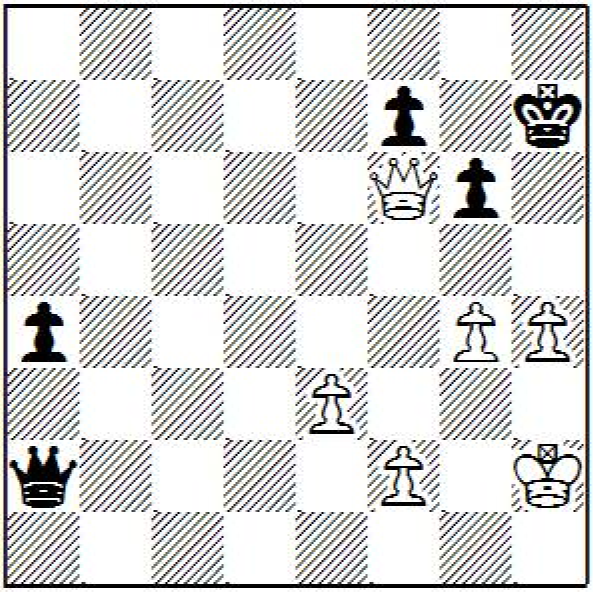
c) 31 Qa7!? (the most dangerous) 31 ... Qe5!? 32 Qxf7 Qa1+ 33 Kh2 Qxa2 with counterplay, but the quiet 31 ... f6 32 e4 Qe5 is also possible – in my opinion, Keres is right, although this position contains numerous nuances: 33 Qf7 Qa1+ 34 Kh2 Qxa2 35 Qh5+ Kg8 36 Qxc5 b3 37 Qc8+ Kh7 38 Qf5+ Kh8 39 c5 b2 40 c6 Qc4 41 Qc8+ Kh7 42 Qb7 Qxe4 43 Qxb2 Qxc6, and the queen endgame with ‘three against two’ is objectively drawn.

‘Thus analysis shows that even after 28 c4! Black could have played on, retaining excellent drawing chances,’ Keres sums up. ‘It is a pity that Rubinstein did not decide on this, and that Capablanca’s wonderful idea remained unnoticed by the chess world.’

28 ... bxc3 29 Qxc3 Qb1+ 30 Kh2 Qxa2

The passed a-pawn together with the attack on the f2-pawn gives Black an easy draw.

31 Qc8+ Kh7 32 Qf5+ g6 33 Qf6 a5!? (Capa is no longer satisfied with the drawing 33 ... Qe6) **34 g4 a4**



35 h5! gxh5!

Of course, not 35 ... Qe6? 36 hxg6+ and not 35 ... a3?! 36 h6 Kxh6?? (36 ... Qb2!) 37 Qh8+ Kg5 38 Kg3 and Qh4 mate.

36 Qf5+

Again I agree with Keres: ‘Rubinstein is right to give up any further attempts to win. He forces a draw, since after 36 gxh5 Qe6! there is a risk of losing.’

36 ... Kg7 37 Qg5+ (37 gxh5 a3 38 e4 Qb2!) **37 ... Kh7 38 Qxh5+ Kg7 ½-½**

‘It is amazing with what skill Capablanca was able to draw this bad endgame.’ (Keres)

Was it an accident that Akiba missed the win? I think not: remember his error against Capa in San Sebastian – 38 Bd5? (*Game No.64*), and also other errors, which increased with the years ... After all, Rubinstein was first and foremost a great thinker and researcher in chess, whereas at the board he acted rather conservatively, and was inferior to Capablanca and Lasker in the purely playing aspects. In order to withstand the enormous tension and overcome these exceptionally tenacious fighters, you had to have, like a cat, nine lives!

After this draw, a vexing one for White and a fortunate one for Black, the paths of the two opponents diverged in different directions. The unsettled Rubinstein suffered a heavy defeat against Lasker (*Game No.66*) and then, after a bad oversight, against Alekhine – and produced the greatest surprise of St Petersburg 1914: he did not finish in the top five places. Whereas the inspired Capablanca set a fantastic pace (6 out of 7!) and won the preliminary tournament by a big margin.

The following win by the Cuban was awarded the first brilliancy prize, controversially beating the well-known game Nimzowitsch-Tarrasch with bishop sacrifices on h2 and g2 (*Game No.51*). However, I am not sure that this decision of the jury was correct: Capablanca’s opponent played the opening really very badly.

Game 83

J.R.Capablanca-O.Bernstein

St Petersburg 1914, preliminary tournament

Queen’s Gambit D51

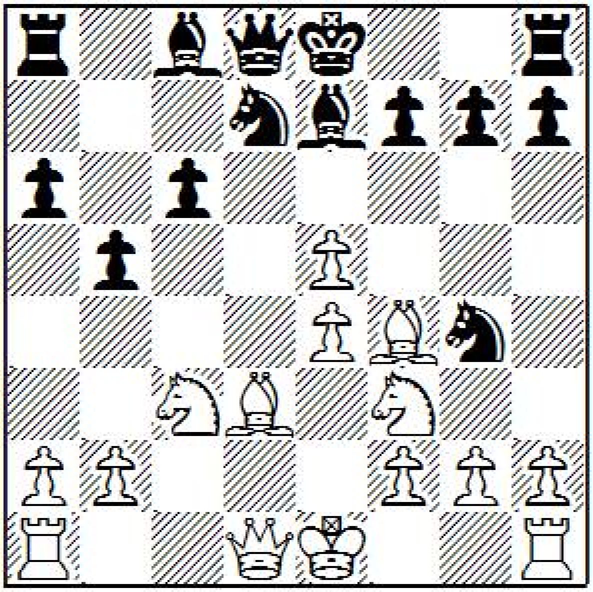
1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 c4 e6 4 Nc3 Nbd7 5 Bg5 Be7 6 e3 c6?!

This is Bernstein's favourite plan with ... c7-c6, ... dxc4, ... b7-b5, ... a7-a6, ... c6-c5 and ... Bb7, which was also tried by Capablanca in the preceding game with Rubinstein (incidentally the latter also made use of this sensible idea in developing the Meran Variation). However, 6 ... 0-0 is more accurate, and only after 7 Rc1 – 7 ... c6, while if 7 Bd3, then immediately 7 ... c5!

7 Bd3 dxc4 8 Bxc4 b5 9 Bd3 a6 10 e4 e5?

A dubious venture, which is accurately refuted by Capablanca. The thematic 10 ... c5 is correct, and if 11 e5 – 11 ... Nd5! (but not 11 ... cxd4? 12 exf6 gxf6 13 Nxd4 fxg5 14 Nxe6! – 14 Be4!? – 14 ... fxe6 15 Qh5+ Kf8 16 Qf3+ Kg7 17 Qxa8 Nc5 18 Be2 Bb7 19 Qxd8 Rxd8 20 f3) 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 (12 ... Nxc3? 13 Bxd8 Nxd1 14 Rxd1 Kxd8 15 Be4 wins) 13 Nxd5 exd5 14 0-0 c4 15 Bc2 0-0 with a somewhat inferior, but acceptable game.

11 dxe5 Ng4 12 Bf4!



12 ... Bc5?

For some reason no one has pointed out that this is also a mistake, and possibly already the decisive one. After 12 ... Qc7! White would have retained the advantage only by 13 Rc1! (13 0-0 Ngxe5 14 Rc1 Bd6; 13 Qc2 Ngxe5 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Bxe5 Qxe5 16 Nxb5 0-0 17 Nc3 Bd6 with compensation for the pawn) 13 ... Ngxe5 14 Nd5! Qa5+ 15 Kf1 cxd5 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 Bxe5 f6 18 Bf4 Be6 19 exd5 Bxd5 20 Qh5+ Bf7 21 Qf3 0-0 22 Qe4 Bg6 23 Qe6+ Rf7 24 Bxg6 hxg6 25 g3 etc.

13 0-0 Qc7

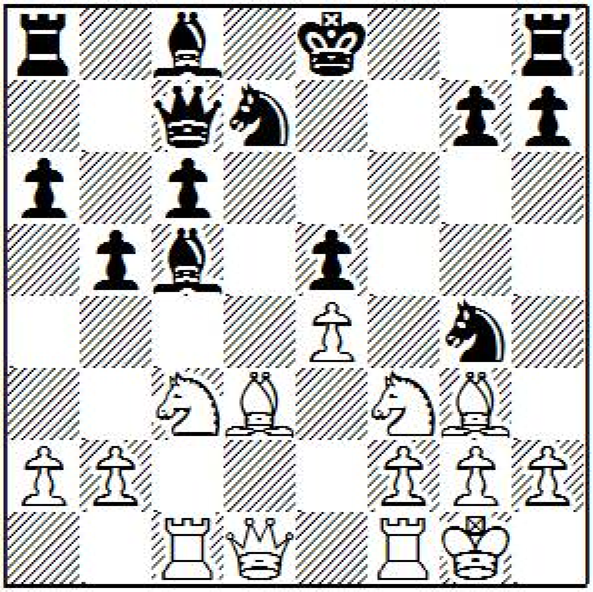
Black rejected 13 ... Qe7 because of 14 e6!, although after 14 ... fxe6 (forced: 14 ... Qxe6? 15 Ng5) 15 e5 0-0 16 Qd2 things are perhaps not as bad for him as in the game.

14 Rc1 f6

‘Necessary, since if 14 ... Ngxe5? there would have followed 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Nxb5! cxb5 17 b4 with a winning position for White.’ (Panov) This is hardly so in view of 17 ... Bg4! 18 Be2 Nf3+ 19 Bxf3 Qxf4, but 17 Qh5! does in fact win.

15 Bg3 (15 b4!? fxe5 16 Bg3 would have come to the same thing) **15 ... fxe5**

In the event of 15 ... Ngxe5 White could have continued the attack by 16 Nxe5 fxe5 17 Qb3.’ (Panov) But what about, say, 17 ... Qd6! 18 Rfd1 etc? I prefer 17 b4!? Bxb4 18 Nd5 Qd6 19 Nxb4 Qxb4 20 Rxc6 with an obvious advantage.

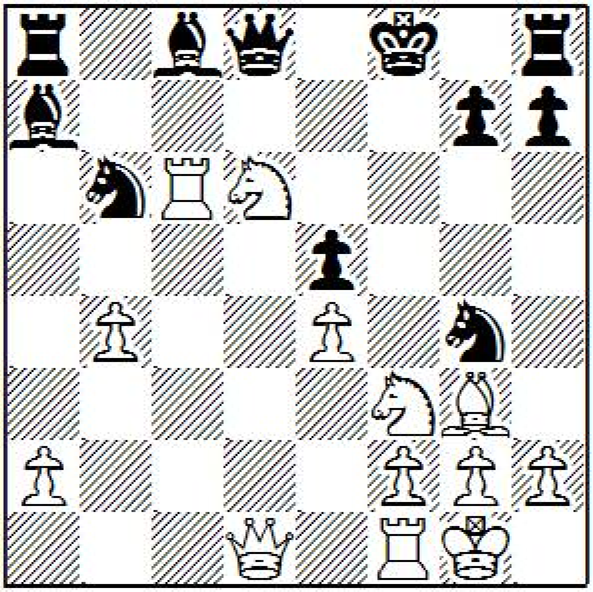


16 b4! Ba7

Also bad are both 16 ... Bxb4 because of 17 Nd5 Qd6 18 Nxb4 Qxb4 19 Rxc6 0-0 20 Bc2, and 16 ... Bd6 17 Bxb5 axb5 18 Nxb5 cxb5 19 Rxc7

Bxc7 20 Qd5 Ra6 21 Rc1 Ngf6 22 Qxb5+. After regaining the pawn, Black is too far behind in development ...

17 Bxb5! (as Capa writes, ‘it is now time to carry on the assault’) **17 ... axb5 18 Nxb5 Qd8 19 Nd6+ Kf8 20 Rxc6 Nb6**



21 Bh4!

‘This is to my mind the finest move in the game. Before making it I had to plough through a mass of combinations which totalled at least one hundred moves. The text combination is one of them, and I had to see through the whole thing to the end before I decided on this move. Otherwise the simple continuation 21 Nxe5 would have been adopted.’ (Capablanca)

21 ... Qd7 (if 21 ... Nf6 the simplest reply is 22 Nxe5 Qe7 23 Bxf6 gxf6 24 Nxc8 Rxc8 25 Nd7+) **22 Nxc8!**

A clear plan, although, in my opinion, the line 22 b5!? Ba6 23 Ng5 Bxb5 24 Rc7 is also strong.

22 ... Qxc6 23 Qd8+

Subsequently the commentators pointed out a quicker way to win – 23 Be7+! Ke8 24 Qd8+ Kf7 25 Ng5+ Kg6 26 Qxh8 Nf6 27 Bxf6 Qxf6 28 h4!, or 23 ... Kf7 24 Ng5+ Kg6 25 Qxg4 Qxc8 26 Ne6+ Kf7 27 Qxg7+ Kxe6 28 Rd1!

23 ... Qe8 (not 23 ... Kf7? 24 Nd6+) **24 Be7+ Kf7 25 Nd6+ Kg6 26 Nh4+ Kh5**

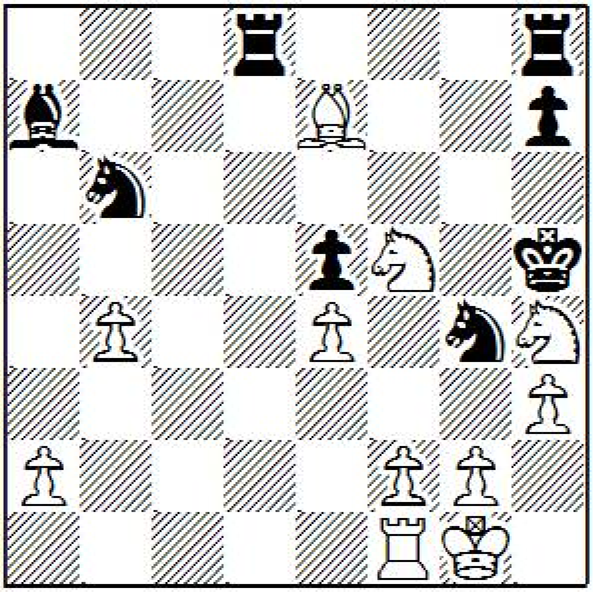
If 26 ... Kh6, then 27 Ndf5+ Kh5 28 Ng3+ Kh6 29 Bg5 mate.

27 Nxe8 Rxd8

‘The resistance would by no means have been prolonged by 27 ... Rxe8 28 Qd1 with the threat of 29 h3!’ (Panov)

28 Nxg7+ Kh6 29 Ngf5+ Kh5 30 h3!

‘The climax of the combination started with 21 Bh4. White is still threatening mate, and the best way to avoid it is for Black to give back all the material he is ahead and remain three pawns behind.’ (Capablanca)



30 ... Nc8 (but not 30 ... Rd7? 31 hxg4+ Kxg4 32 f3+ Kf4 33 g3 mate!) **31 hxg4+ Kxg4 32 Bxd8 Rxd8 33 g3 Rd2 34 Kg2! Re2**

Or 34 ... Rxa2 35 Nf3 winning. Again Bernstein ‘forgets’ to resign ...

35 a4 Nb6 36 Ne3+ Kh5 37 a5 Nd7 38 Nhf5 Nf6 39 b5 Bd4 40 Kf3 Ra2 41 a6 Ba7 42 Rc1 Rb2 43 g4+ Kg6 44 Rc7 Rxf2+ 45 Kxf2 Nxg4+ 46 Kf3 1-0

Not so spectacular, but no less instructive, was Capa’s win over Janowski. Playing through this game, one is again struck by the difference in class between the young Cuban and his eminent opponent. To evaluate correctly Capablanca’s role at this stage in the development of chess, it should be remembered that here he was playing one of the best masters at the start of the century, and a participant in a match for the world championship.

Game 84

J.R.Capablanca-D.Janowski

St Petersburg 1914, preliminary tournament

Ruy Lopez C68

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6

White operates as simply as possible, remembering San Sebastian, where Capa miraculously escaped, after coming under a crushing attack (*Game No.77*). Dry, tedious play sickened Janowski – back in the match with Lasker (Paris 1909) he played the Exchange Variation badly with Black, and this had obviously been taken into account by Capablanca.

4 ... dxc6 5 Nc3

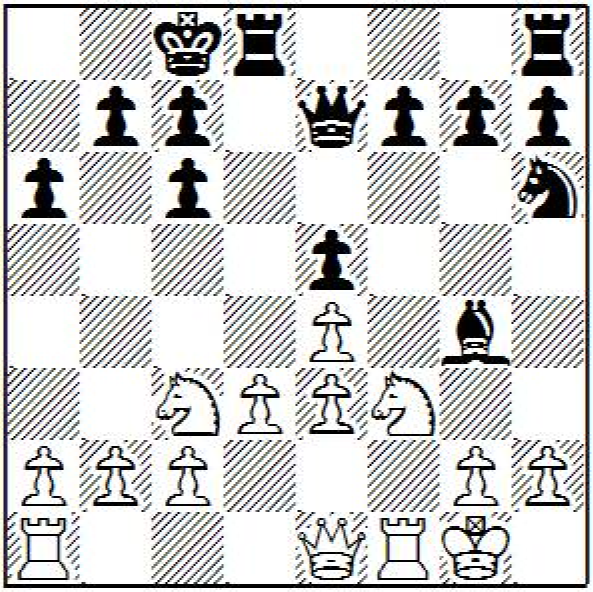
In the final tournament Lasker ‘swindled’ Capa with the help of 5 d4 (*Game No.68*), and the time for 5 0-0! had not yet then arrived.

5 ... Bc5?! (the usual 5 ... f6 is sounder) **6 d3 Bg4 7 Be3 Bxe3?!** (7 ... Qe7) **8 fxe3 Qe7?!**

It would have been better to play the knight here after 8 ... f6!?

9 0-0 0-0-0?! (9 ... Nh6 and ... 0-0) **10 Qe1 Nh6?!**

Of course, 10 ... f6 is more accurate, but that was how they played chess then! Slowly, without himself being aware of it, Janowski loses the game ...



11 Rb1!!

Not wasting time on a2-a3. This plan of attack has become a classic one in such positions. For example: 5 0-0 Qd6 6 d3 f6 7 Be3 Bg4 (7 ... Ne7 8 Nbd2 Be6 9 b4!) 8 Nbd2 0-0-0 9 Rb1! Ne7 10 b4 g5 11 a4 Ng6 12 b5! etc. (Mecking-Korchnoi, Augusta 12th matchgame 1974).

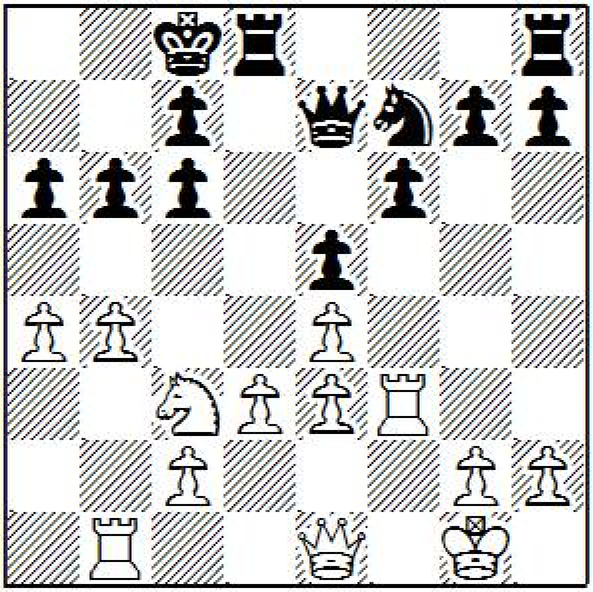
12 ... f6 12 b4 Nf7?!

Possibly the only defence was 12 ... Be6! 13 a4 b6 14 b5 cxb5 15 axb5 a5, in order to control the d5-square. But Janowski simply does not yet realise how bad his position is.

13 a4 Bxf3

'He simplifies, hoping to lighten White's attack.' (Capablanca) 13 ... Be6?! is now too late in view of 14 b5 cxb5 15 axb5 a5 16 b6! winning.

14 Rxf3 b6?



‘He is forced to do this in order to avoid the breaking up of his queenside pawns. The only alternative would have been 14 ... b5, which on the face of it looks bad.’ (Capablanca) ‘Now the white knight occupies d5, and the game is strategically decided. The best chance of a defence was 14 ... b5 with the idea of ... Kb7 and ... Ra8.’ (Panov) I think that Panov was right, although Black also has a bad position after 15 Ne2! Ng5 16 Rf2 Ne6 17 Nc1.

15 b5! cxb5 16 axb5 a5 17 Nd5 Qc5 18 c4!

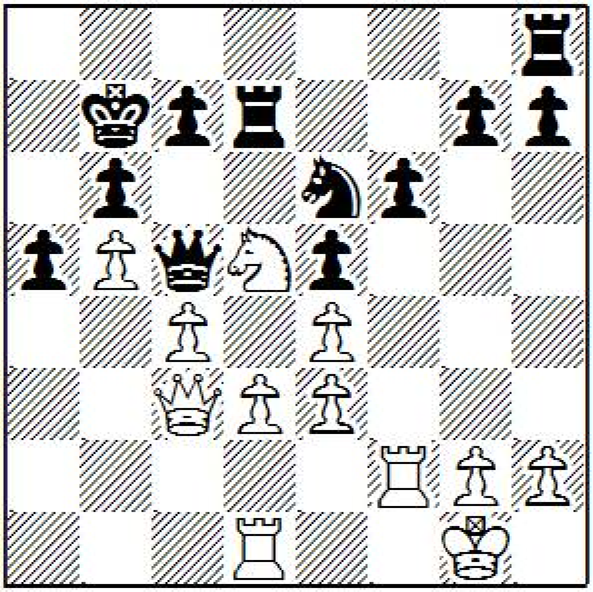
Supporting the knight and intending a simple and natural strategic plan with d3-d4 and c4-c5. Amazing: Black has not blundered, yet he can already resign!

18 ... Ng5 19 Rf2!

But not 19 Rf1 Ne6 20 Qc3? because of 20 ... Rxd5! 21 exd5 Qxe3+ and ... Nc5.

19 ... Ne6 20 Qc3 Rd7 21 Rd1! (21 Rd2? Rxd5!) **21 ... Kb7?!**

21 ... Kd8 was slightly more tenacious.



22 d4 Qd6

'Also after 22 ... Qf8 the game is immediately decided by the same manoeuvre by White.' (Panov)

23 Rc2! exd4 24 exd4 Nf4 (this loses a piece, but there is no way of saving the game) **25 c5! Nxd5 26 exd5 Qxd5 27 c6+ Kb8 28 cxd7 Qxd7 29 d5 Re8 30 d6 cxd6 31 Qc6 1-0**

'The impetuous Capablanca has gained a whole series of brilliant wins and now stands ahead of everyone,' Lasker wrote after the preliminary tournament. 'To score 8 out of 10 – that is no joke! Now he has the opportunity to show whether he can maintain the advantage he has gained.'

However, in the final a miracle of another sort occurred: Lasker, trailing by one and a half points, managed to defeat Capablanca (*Game No.68*), score 7 and of 8 and take first place! The Cuban, who also lost to Tarrasch (blundering a piece), finished half a point behind, while the third prize-winner Alekhine was 3½ behind ... At the concluding banquet Capablanca maintained a brave face. He congratulated the world champion on his victory and apologised for his sharp letter of more than two years earlier regarding the conditions for the world championship match. In reply Lasker offered a toast to Capablanca's further successes, and they shook hands with each other in a sign of reconciliation.

‘The fact that Capablanca took second place in this tournament, conceding the advantage to Lasker, must be put down exclusively to youthful flippancy,’ Alekhine later wrote. ‘Already then Capablanca was playing as well as Lasker ... ’ It is well known that during the tournament, endless dinners, banquets and receptions were arranged in honour of the amicable and sociable Cuban and, before the decisive game with Tarrasch, he and Alekhine spent the entire evening making merry with friends and then they walked for a long time around St Petersburg, with its fairy-tale beauty of the white nights ...

Capablanca’s own summary was interesting: ‘My poor physical condition and Lasker’s superb form at the finish tell the tale, but at any rate it became evident that we stood above the rest of the competitors, and that only a match could decide who was the better of the two. I hope the match will come, the sooner the better, as I don’t want to play an old man, but a master in the plenitude of his powers.’

It cannot be denied that this is a wish, worthy of a true gentleman! Alas, the First World War intervened ...

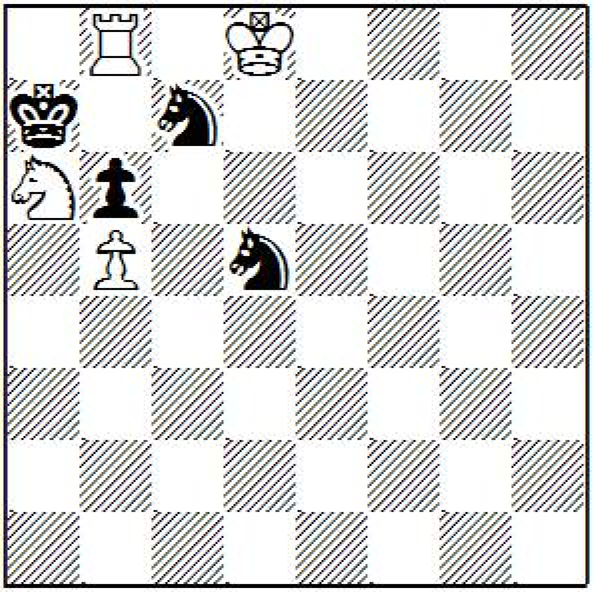
The Marshall Counterattack

Nevertheless Lasker and Capablanca met once more before the War: in July 1914 in Berlin they played a blitz match of 10 games (at the rate of 5 seconds per move). As the world champion admitted, ‘even with such severely restricted time, Capablanca hardly made any mistakes.’ He was victorious in the match (6½-3½), winning in study-like fashion the following ending:

Game 85

J.R.Capablanca-Em.Lasker

Blitz game/composition, Berlin 1914



1 Nxc7 Nxc7 2 Ra8+!! (but not 2 Kxc7?? stalemate!) **2 ... Nxa8** (2 ... Kxa8 3 Kxc7 Ka7 4 Kc6; 2 ... Kb7 3 Ra7+!!) **3 Kc8! 1-0**

Black resigned due to 4 ... Nc7 4 Kxc7 etc.

However, it is hard to imagine what Black’s move was before the diagram position. If it was ... Na8-c7, then why not ... Nd5-c3 and ... Nxb5 with a dead draw? And what did White play before that? ... At any event, the two players ‘repaired’ the position and published a joint study in the newspaper *Vossische Zeitung* (26 07.1914), where the black d5 knight was stationed on e6, and the white king on d7. (It is debateable whether the above ‘game’ actually took place, or whether it is entirely a composition.)

At that time the current and future world champions discussed the question of creating an International Chess Federation, of which the leading chess countries in Europe were in favour. But these plans were dashed by the war ...

Capablanca returned to America and over the next five years gradually prepared for a match for the world crown, performing triumphantly in second-rate events. He won three New York tournaments (1915, 1916 and 1918), and at the start of the latter he produced, together with Marshall, another classic game.

Game 86

J.R.Capablanca-F.Marshall

New York 1918

Ruy Lopez C89

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6

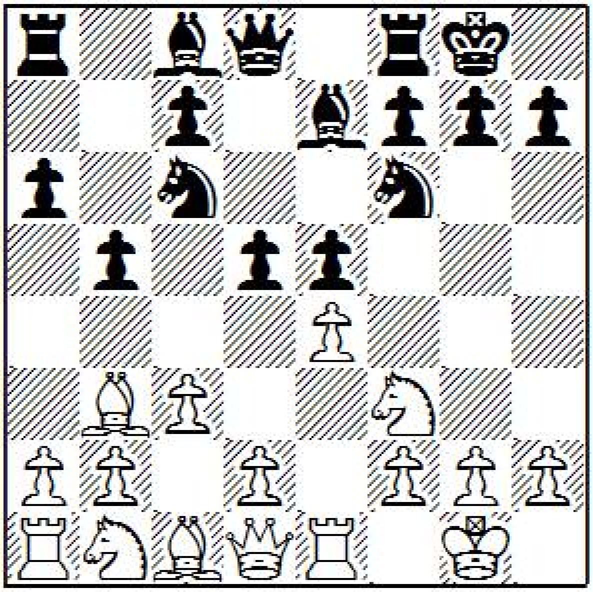
'My first surprise. For the first time in ten years Marshall allowed me to play a Ruy Lopez.' (Capablanca)

3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0!?

'My second surprise. I now felt that Marshall had prepared something for me ... The reason was that he had found a prepared a variation for me, and had kept it for two years, awaiting the opportunity of playing it in a tournament against me.' (Capablanca)

Incidentally, Marshall's idea was anticipated by the game Taubenhaus-Chigorin (Ostend 1905): 7 ... d6 8 c3 0-0 9 d3 Bg4 10 Nbd2 Re8 11 Nf1 d5! 12 exd5 Nxd5 13 h3 Bh5 14 g4 Bg6 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Rxe5 (a familiar picture!) 16 ... Nf6 17 d4 Bd6 18 Rxe8+ Qxe8 19 Be3 Be4! 20 f3 Bb7 with excellent counterplay for the pawn.

8 c3 d5!? (here it is, the Marshall Attack!)



9 exd5 Nxd5

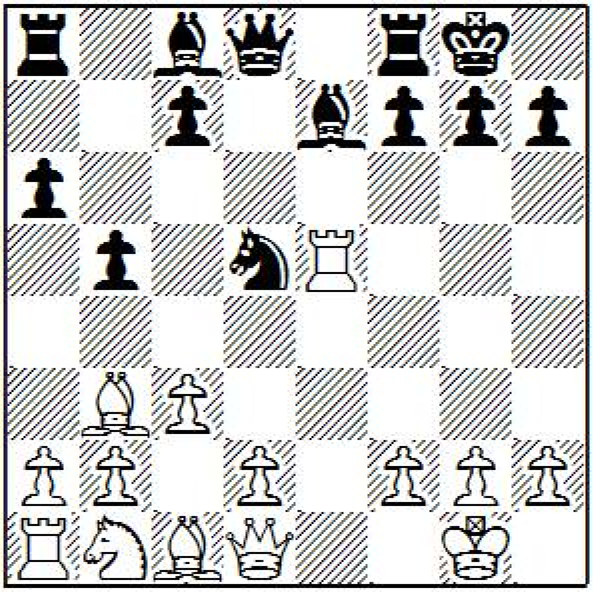
Later the intricate 9 ... e4 10 dxc6 exf3 11 Qxf3 Bg4 12 Qg3 Re8 13 d4 Bd6 14 Rxe8+ Qxe8 was also tried.

10 Nxe5

‘The lust of battle had been aroused within me. I felt that my judgement and skill were being challenged ... I decided that I was in honour bound, so to speak, to take and pawn and accept the challenge.’ (Capablanca)

10 ... Nxe5 11 Rxe5

So, Black has sacrificed a pawn ...



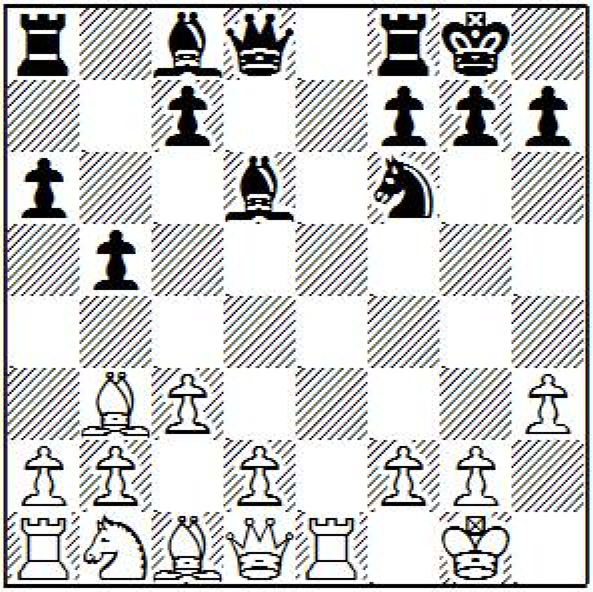
11 ... Nf6?!

In 1938 Marshall introduced the main line 11 ... c6!, which was later developed in detail by Soviet players, including Spassky and Geller. And nowadays it is played by Adams, Short, Khalifman, Svidler ...

12 Re1

Later 12 d4 Bd6 13 Re1 (13 Re2 Nh5!) 13 ... Ng4 14 h3 Qh4 15 Qf3! became generally accepted. Capablanca tries to divert his opponent from his prepared analysis, but things revert to a simple transposition of moves.

12 ... Bd6 13 h3



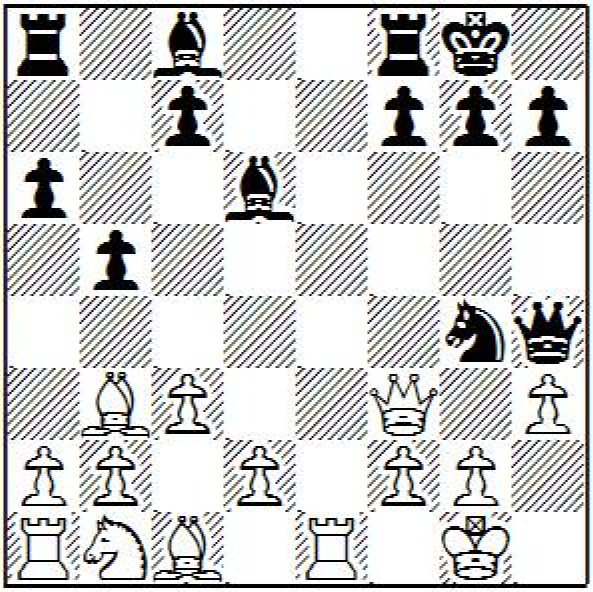
13 ... Ng4!?

Bold – and fully in Marshall's style. Panov recommended the positional plan with 13 ... Bb7 14 d4 Qd7, although a pawn is a pawn.

14 Qf3!

Both defence, and aggression; 14 hxg4? Qh4 15 Qf3 Bh2+! and 16 ... Bxg4 with a decisive attack.

14 ... Qh4



15 d4

Again 15 hxg4? is bad in view of 15 ... Bh2+! 16 Kf1 Bxg4 17 Qe4 Bf4! 18 g3 Qh2 and White has no defence:

1) 19 Re3 Rae8 20 Qd5 Bxg3! 21 Rxg3 (21 Qxf7+ Kh8!) 21 ... Be2+ 22 Ke1 Bf3+;

2) 19 Bxf7+ Kxf7 20 Qd5+ Kg6 21 Re6+ Bxe6 22 Qxe6+ Kh5 23 Qd5+ Bg5 24 Qg2 Rxf2+! 25 Qxf2 Qh1+ 26 Ke2 Re8+ (Tal);

3) 19 gxf4 (my attempt) 19 ... Bh3+! (but not 19 ... Rae8 20 Bxf7+ Kxf7 21 Qd5+ Kg6 22 Qg5+ Kf7 23 Qd5+ Be6 24 Rxe6 Rxe6 25 f5 Qh3+ 26 Kg1 Qg4+ with a draw) 20 Ke2 Rae8 21 d3 Bg4+ 22 Ke3 Rxe4+ 23 dxe4 Qh3+ 24 Kd4 Rd8+ 25 Kc5 Qh6 winning.

15 ... Nxf2

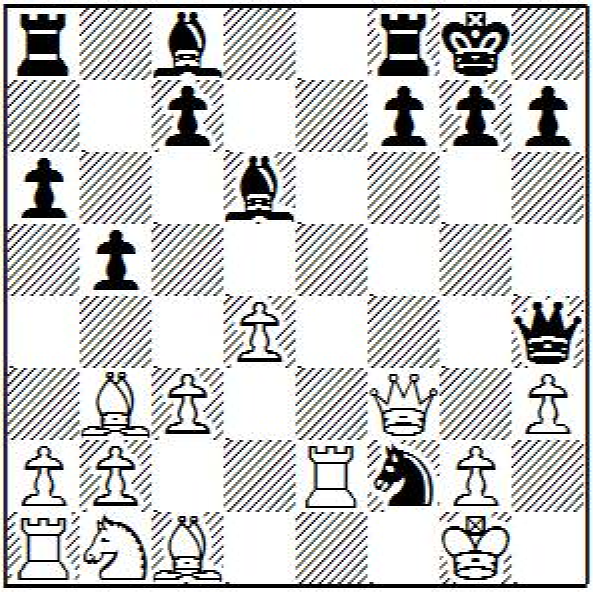
‘The trapper trapped. Black, however, had nothing better, and had to go on with the attack to do or die.’ (Capablanca) Not reckoning on Shamkovich’s idea of 15 ... h5!? 16 Be3 (16 Nd2 Bh2+ 17 Kf1 Bd6! is equal) 16 ... Nxe3 17 Rxe3 Qf4 18 Qxf4 Bxf4 19 Re1 Bf5, when Black’s two powerful bishops prevent White from converting his extra pawn.

16 Re2

Of course, not 16 Qxf2? Bh2+! 17 Kf1 Bg3 18 Qe2 Bxh3 19 gxh3 Rae8 and White is in trouble. However, in the 1950s it transpired that 16 Bd2! is stronger, for example:

1) 16 ... Bb7?! (16 ... Ng4? 17 Re8!; 16 ... Be6? 17 Re3!, but not 17 Qxf2? Bg3 18 Qe3 Rae8 19 Re2 Bxh3 20 Qxe8 Be6!) 17 Qxb7 Nd3 18 Re2! Rae8 (or 18 ... Qg3 19 Kf1! Qh2 20 g4! Qxh3+ 21 Qg2 Qh4 22 Be3 Rae8 23 Nd2 Bf4 24 Nf3 Qh6 25 Bc2 and wins) 19 Qf3 Rxe2 20 Qxe2 Qg3 21 Qf3! Qh2+ 22 Kf1 Qh1+ 23 Ke2 Nxb2 24 Be3 winning (Euwe);

2) 16 ... Bxh3 17 gxh3 Nxh3+ 18 Kf1 Ng5 (Lilienthal; 18 ... g5 19 Re4 Bf4 20 Bxf4 Nxf4 21 Nd2 Rad8 22 Rxf4! gxf4 23 Ne4 Aronin) 19 Bxg5 (19 Qg2 Rae8!) 19 ... Qxg5 20 Na3 c5 21 Rad1 with an obvious advantage to White.



16 ... Bg4?

‘The best way to continue the attack.’ (Capablanca) Nothing of the sort! Tartakower pointed out the saving move 16 ... Ng4!, for example:

1) 17 Re8 Nf6! 18 Rxf8+ Kxf8 19 Nd2 Rb8 20 Nf1 Bb7 with equality;

2) 17 Bf4 Bb7 18 d5 Nf6 19 Bxd6 cxd6 20 Nd2 Rae8 is also level;

3) 17 Qxa8 Qg3 18 hxg4 Qh2+ 19 Kf1 Bg3 20 Be3 Qh1+ 21 Bg1 Bh2, and here everyone gives the cooperative variation 22 Ke1? Qxg1+ 23 Kd2 Bf4+, overlooking 22 Bxf7+! Kh8 (or 22 ... Rxf7+ 23 Ke1 Qxg1+ 24 Kd2 Rf8 25 Qd5+ Kh8 26 Qf3! Bd6 27 Re1) 23 Re6!! Qxg1+ 24 Ke2 Qc1 25 Nd2 Qxa1 26 Re8 Rxe8+ 27 Bxe8 Bxg4+ 28 Kd3 Bf5+ 29 Ke2 with equality; sharp play also results from 19 Kf2!? Bxg4 20 Qe4 Bg3+ 21 Ke3

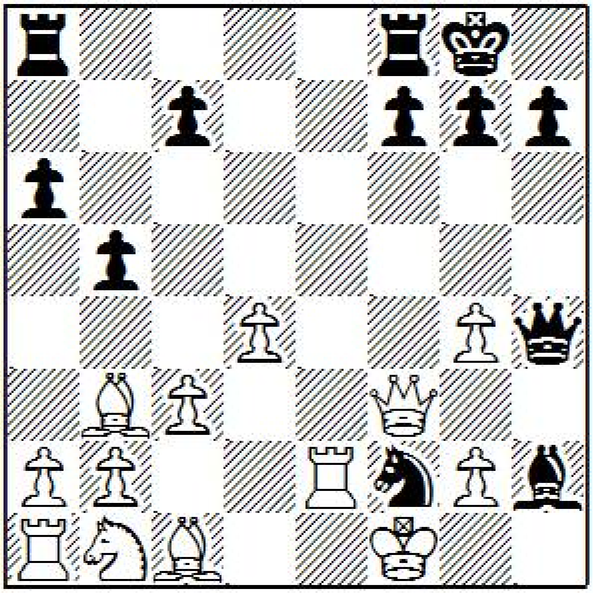
Qg1+ 22 Kd3 Bxe2+ 23 Qxe2 Qxc1 24 Bd1 Be1!? 25 Qxe1 Qxb2 26 Bb3 Qxa1 27 Kc2 a5 etc.;

4) 17 g3!? (this would appear to be the best) 17 ... Qxh3 18 Qxa8 Bxg3 19 Qg2 Qh4 20 Nd2 and there is everything to play for.

17 hxg4 (but not 17 Qxf2? Bg3 18 Qf1 Bxe2 19 Qxe2 Rae8) **17 ... Bh2+**

Less good was 17 ... Nxg4?! 18 Bf4!

18 Kf1



18 ... Bg3

‘I expected 18 ... Nh1. White, however, can defend in several ways. The best might be 19 Be3.’ (Capablanca) And indeed, after 19 ... Ng3+ 20 Ke1 Rae8 21 Nd2 Bg1 22 Nf1 Nxe2+ 23 Kxe2 Qg5 24 Re1 Black is lost.

19 Rxf2 Qh1+ 20 Ke2 Bxf2?!

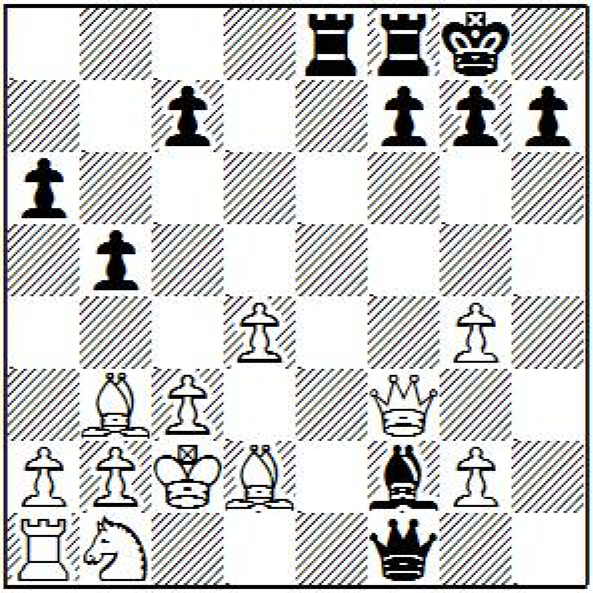
White would have been set greater problems by 20 ... Qxc1! 21 Qxg3 (21 Bxf7?! Kh8 22 Rf1 Qc2+ 23 Nd2 Rae8+! or 21 Rf1 Rae8+ 22 Kd3 Re3+ 23 Qxe3 Qxf1+ 24 Qe2 Qc1 is not so clear) 21 ... Qxb2+ 22 Kd3 Qxa1 23 Kc2 Rae8! (Panov’s suggestion of 23 ... b4?! 24 g5! is weaker) 24 Qxc7 Re1 25 Nd2 etc.

21 Bd2! Bh4 22 Qh3!

‘Black, in order to avoid the exchange of queens, is now compelled to drive the king to c2, where he is safe.’ (Capablanca)

22 ... Rae8+ 23 Kd3 Qf1+ 24 Kc2 Bf2 25 Qf3!

After this pendulum move Black’s activity comes to a standstill.



25 ... Qg1

Unpinning the bishop. If 25 ... Re2, then 26 a4! Qe1 27 axb5! Rxd2+ (27 ... Be3? 28 Qxe3!) 28 Nxd2 Qxa1 29 Qxf2 axb5 30 Nf3 wins.

26 Bd5 c5 27 dxc5 Bxc5 28 b4!

The attack is repulsed, and White’s material advantage decides the outcome.

28 ... Bd6 29 a4 a5?! (a despairing chance) **30 axb5 axb4 31 Ra6! bxc3 32 Nxc3 Bb4 33 b6 Bxc3 34 Bxc3 h6**

Or 34 ... Re3 35 Qxf7+!

35 b7 Re3 36 Bxf7+! 1-0

In view of inevitable mate, Black resigned. ‘This clash, like the San Sebastian game Capablanca-Janowski (*Game No.77*), clearly demonstrates the Cuban player’s skill in the defence of even the most complicated and double-edged positions.’ (Panov)

In the spring of 1919 Capablanca won a match in Havana against Boris Kostić (the second prize-winner at New York 1918), who before that had drawn all his games with the Cuban, but here the score was 5-0! The winner was to be the first to win eight games, but Kostic fully appreciated the situation and resigned the match ...

In the summer Capa again moved to Europe and played in the tournament in Hastings, which from that time began to be held every year (true, in the Christmas holidays), but in that post-war year it did not have many famous names: 1. Capablanca – 10½ out of 11; 2. Kostic – 9½; 3-4. Thomas and Yates – 7 etc.

Over that five-year period the Cuban had reinforced the legend of his invincibility, gaining an impressive score in serious games: +48 -1 =10. In his opinion, in St Petersburg he had already achieved the peak of his chess strength. ‘Hereafter I may gain a little from experience,’ he wrote in 1919, ‘and the style may be changed somewhat accordingly, but whatever I may gain in one way I am sure will show a corresponding loss somewhere else.’

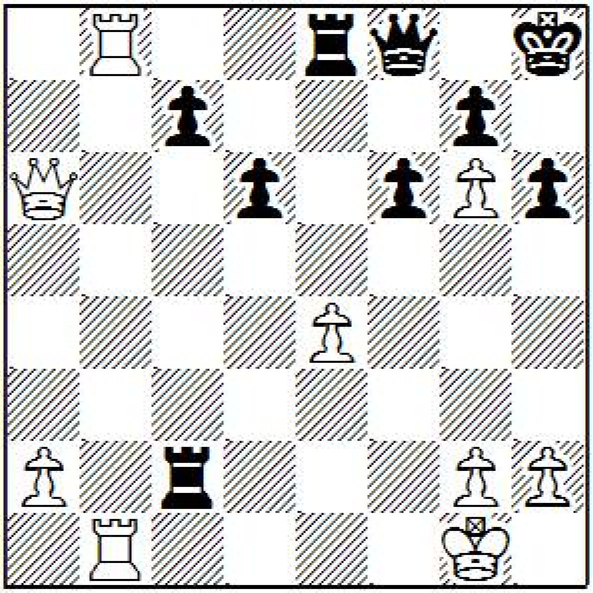
His play seemed almost ideal, and only after a careful study was it possible to see ‘spots on the sun’ – barely perceptible symptoms of the process that Soviet journalism, which was rich in nicknames, christened ‘the degradation of creative directives’.

Typical was the finish to the Hastings game between Capablanca and Sir George Thomas, the leading English player of that time (and, incidentally, very highly respected in the chess world).

Game 87

J.R.Capablanca-G.Thomas

Hastings 1919, 4th round



Here White landed the ‘decisive’ blow **29 Qa8?** and ... Black resigned because of 29 ... Rxb8? 30 Rxb8 with unavoidable mate. Another masterpiece by the Cuban genius? Alas, just the opposite! The unexpected 29 ... Rxa2!! would have dispelled White’s illusions: after 30 Qb7 (30 Qxa2 Rxb8; 30 Rxe8 Rxa8! 31 Rxf8+ Rxf8) 30 ... c5 31 Rxe8 Qxe8 32 Qf7 Ra8 the limit of his dreams is compensation for the pawn.

Meanwhile he missed an easy win: 29 Qb5! Rxb8 30 Qxb8 Rc1+ (30 ... Kg8 31 Qb3+) 31 Kf2 Rc2+ 32 Ke3 Kg8 33 Qb3+ d5 34 Qxc2 or, even more attractive, 29 Rxe8! Qxe8 30 Qa4!! Rxg2+ (30 ... Qxa4 31 Rb8+ and mate; 30 ... Rc1+ 31 Kf2) 31 Kxg2 Qxg6+ 32 Kh1.

Curiously, the next day Capablanca managed without any tactical brilliance, creating a textbook example on the theme ‘a bishop out of play’.

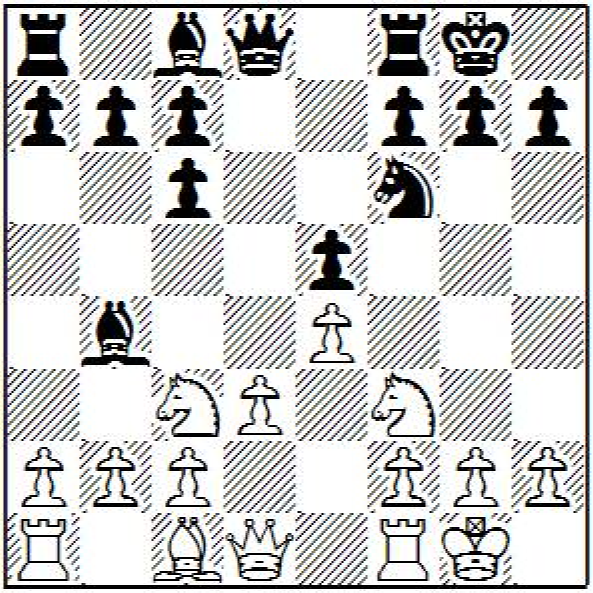
Game 88

W.Winter-J.R.Capablanca

Hastings 1919, 5th round

Four Knights Game C49

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 Bb4 5 0-0 0-0 6 Bxc6!? (instead of the usual 6 d3) **6 ... dxc6** (6 ... bxc6?! – *Game No.110*) **7 d3**



Nimzowitsch’s Variation, which is similar to the Exchange Variation and the later Hort Variation in the Ruy Lopez. 7 Nxe5 is harmless in view of 7 ... Re8 or immediately 7 ... Bxc3 8 dxc3 Nxe4.

7 ... Bd6

A new move! At the time the following games had been seen, where White had held the initiative:

1) 7 ... Bg4 8 h3 Bh5 (8 ... Bxf3!?) 9 Bg5 (9 Kh1 Qe7 10 Rg1 Rad8 11 Qe2 h6 12 Nd1 Bc5 13 g4 Bg6 14 Nh4 Paulsen-Göring, Leipzig 1877) 9 ... Qd6 10 Bxf6 Qxf6 11 g4 Bg6 12 Kg2 Rad8 13 Qe2 (with the idea of Nd1-e3) 13 ... Bxc3 14 bxc3 c5 15 Nd2! Qe7 16 Nc4 b6 17 Ne3 f6 18 Rg1 (Nimzowitsch-Leonhardt, San Sebastian 1911);

2) 7 ... Qd6 8 Ne2 c5 9 Ng3 Ba5 10 Nh4 g6 11 h3, preparing f2-f4 (Nimzowitsch-Vidmar, San Sebastian 1911);

3) 7 ... Re8 8 h3 (8 Ne2!?) 8 ... h6 9 Ne2 Nh5 10 g4 Nf6 11 Ng3 Nh7 12 Nf5 Bxf5 13 gxf5 (Capablanca-Tennenwurtzel, New York 1913), or 8 ... Bxc3 9 bxc3 Qd6 10 Nh4 g6 11 f4 (Capablanca-Kupchik, New York 1913);

4) 7 ... Qe7 8 Qe2 (8 Ne2!? this manoeuvre is also good after the modern 7 ... Nd7) 8 ... Re8 9 h3 g6 10 Qe3 Nh5 11 Ne2 Bc5 12 Qh6 f6 13 g4 Ng7 14 Kg2 Qf7 15 Nh2 Bf8 16 Qe3 (Capablanca-Jaffe, New York 1913).

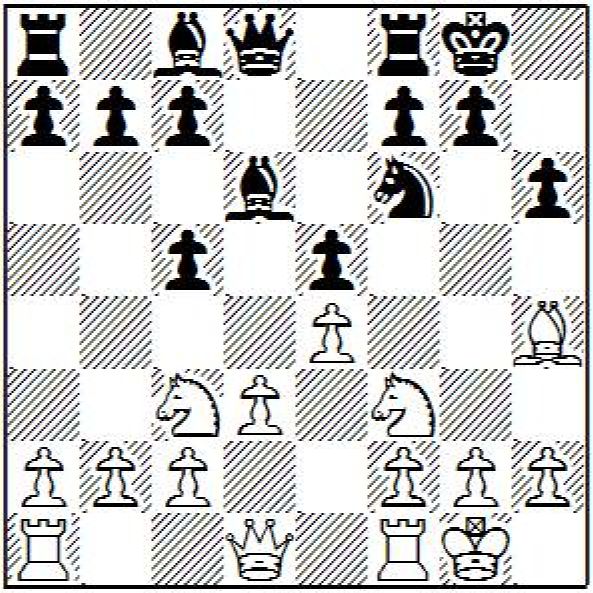
Incidentally, the idea of spoiling the pawns by Bxc6 has proved very long-lived, and not only in the Ruy Lopez. In the Sicilian with 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5, after 3 ... g6, and 3 ... e6, and 3 ... d6 nowadays 4 Bxc6 is often played, giving the opponent the two bishops, but trying to exploit the superior pawn structure. It is the same in the English Opening: 1 c4 e5 (1 ... e6) 2 Nc3 Bb4 or 2 ... Nf6 3 g3 Bb4, aiming to capture soon on c3.

8 Bg5?!

The start of a series of amateur moves. Winter clearly has no feeling for the subtleties of this variation, as otherwise he would have preferred 8 h3, 8 Ne2 or even the unusual 8 Kh1 h6 9 Ng1 (Nimzowitsch-Behting, correspondence 1913).

8 ... h6 9 Bh4 c5

Inhibiting d3-d4 and ... a slight provocation.



10 Nd5?

‘White falls into the trap. Only lack of experience can account for this move.’ (Capablanca) 10 Nd2 followed by Nc4-e3 was in the spirit of the position.

10 ... g5! 11 Nxf6+

In the event of 11 Nxg5? Nxd5! White would have lost a piece: 12 Nf3 Nf6 (12 ... Be7!?) 13 Nd2 Be7. Also hopeless was 11 Bg3 Nxd5 12 exd5

Bg4 13 h3 Bxf3 14 Qxf3 f5 (then ... Qf6, ... Kh7, ... Rf7, ... Rg8 and ... g5-g4 with an attack) or 13 ... Bh5!? 14 Bh2 f5.

11 ... Qxf6 12 Bg3 Bg4 13 h3 Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Qxf3 15 gxf3 f6!

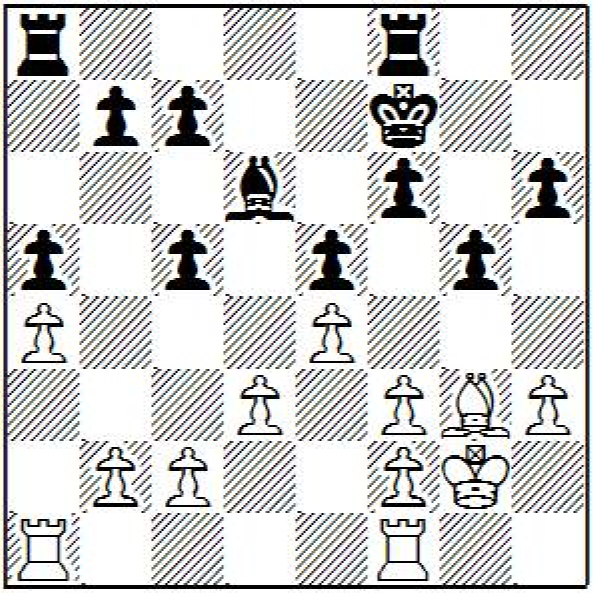
'A simple examination will show that White is minus a bishop for all practical purposes. Black now devotes all his energy to the queenside, and having practically a bishop more the result cannot be in doubt.' (Capablanca) Whether this is so, we shall see ...

16 Kg2

After 16 c3 Rad8 17 Rfd1 Rd7 (18 Rd2 Rfd8) White would have been unable to play d3-d4 without losing material, but 18 Kf1!? Kf7 19 Ke2 would have retained chances of a successful defence. However, the difference in the two opponents' standard of play was so great that Winter's choice is of no great importance.

16 ... a5 (threatening 17 ... a4) **17 a4 Kf7**

In my opinion. the key moment of the game.



18 Rh1?!

The opening of the h-file does not help White: his bishop remains unemployed. Much more interesting was the attempt, ignored by all the commentators, to create a fortress – 18 c4!, for example: 18 ... c6 19 Rfc1 Rfb8 20 b3 b5 21 Rc3! Rb6 22 Kf1 bxc4 23 dxc4 Rab8 24 Ra3! (but not 24 Rb1? Rb4 with the threat of ... Rxa4) and Ke2-d2-c2.

It would appear that the version stemming from Capablanca about ‘how simple it is to win such a game’ is another beautiful legend ...

18 ... Ke6 (preparatory centralisation) **19 h4 Rfb8 20 hxg5 hxg5 21 b3**

If 21 c4!? Black would also have replied 21 ... c6 followed by ... b7-b5.

21 ... c6! (only not 21 ... b5? 22 axb5 Rxb5 23 Ra4 Rb4 24 Rha1 with counterplay) **22 Ra2 b5 23 Rha1 c4!**

The decisive breakthrough. Now it all is indeed simple: if 24 dxc4 bxc4 25 bxc4, then 25 ... Rb4!, followed by ... Rab8, ... Rxc4 etc.

24 axb5 cxb3 25 cxb3 (25 Rxa5? Rxa5 26 Rxa5 b2) **25 ... Rxb5 26 Ra4 Rxb3 27 d4 Rb5! 28 Rc4** (28 dxe5 fxe5!) **28 ... Rb4 29 Rxc6** (29 Rxb4 Bxb4 30 dxe5 fxe5 31 Rc1 c5 also wins) **29 ... Rxd4 0-1**

The triumph of the play aimed at isolating the bishop. In view of 30 Rc2 a4 31 Rca2 a3 32 Kf1 Rb8 33 Ke2 Rb2+ 34 Rxb2 axb2 35 Rb1 Ba3 36 Ke3 Rc4 37 Kd2 Rc1 White resigned.

I repeat, Capablanca won his games mainly because he thought in general categories that were unfamiliar to the majority of his opponents. He intuitively grasped and devised plans for creating weaknesses in the opponent’s position – this was the next step in the development of the Steinitz School. This strategy gave such excellent results, that Capa became lazy about making concrete calculations, doing so only in cases of extreme necessity, as in the above duel with Marshall, and sometimes miscalculating, as in the game with Thomas.

Coronation in his Native Land

Early in 1920 Lasker and Capablanca met in The Hague and signed an agreement about a match for the world championship. The champion wanted to play in Holland and the USA, but due to financial problems this idea failed. By the summer Lasker felt that he had been left to the mercy of fate and he even renounced his title in favour of Capablanca! I think that this was some kind of game: the chess world could not accept such a gift from the long-standing and undisputed champion ... The situation was saved by the challenger’s Havana admirers, who invested a record sum of $20,000 in the match.

Financially ruined by the War, Lasker did not resist this suggestion, although earlier he had ‘firmly decided not to lower the dignity of the champion and not to travel to his opponent’s country, to sub-tropical Havana.’ But the chess public had long been demanding a match for the crown, and in the spring of 1921 this match at last took place. They played with a control of 30 moves in two hours, for the first time to the best of 24 games (later Botvinnik liked this rule and it became a standard one during the second half of the 20th century).

Also for the first time, at the suggestion of the champion, the match agreement included an item that the games were the personal property of the players, who had exclusive rights to their publication. However, nothing came of this: one of the American journalists distributed the game scores right round the world ...

Of course, playing in hot and sultry Havana was very difficult for the 52-year-old Lasker. This is not the sort of age when you can endure such trials. Yes, at the same age Steinitz defeated Chigorin in Havana, but Lasker was playing a Cuban, not a European! In addition, the champion was badly prepared. He himself wrote: ‘I wasn’t able to do any worthwhile training. The last few days before the match I used for acclimatisation, hoping to warm up during the actual play, which I had often succeeded in doing previously, especially in St Petersburg.’

By contrast, the 32-year-old Capablanca, who had been gathering strength far away from the War, was clearly on the rise. Nevertheless, Lasker did not intend to lay down his arms and the match, especially initially, took a very tough and tenacious course. The initial four games ended in draws, and only in the first did one of the sides have any appreciable problems: the champion obtained a good position with Black, but he made a mistake and had to find virtually the only moves to save himself.

The first decisive game was the fifth, in which both players displayed brilliant resourcefulness in an unusual position.

Game 89

J.R.Capablanca-Em.Lasker

World Championship Match, Havana 1921, 5th game

Queen’s Gambit D63

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 c4 e6 4 Bg5 Nbd7 (4 ... c5?! – *Game No. 61*) **5 e3 Be7 6 Nc3 0-0 7 Rc1 b6**

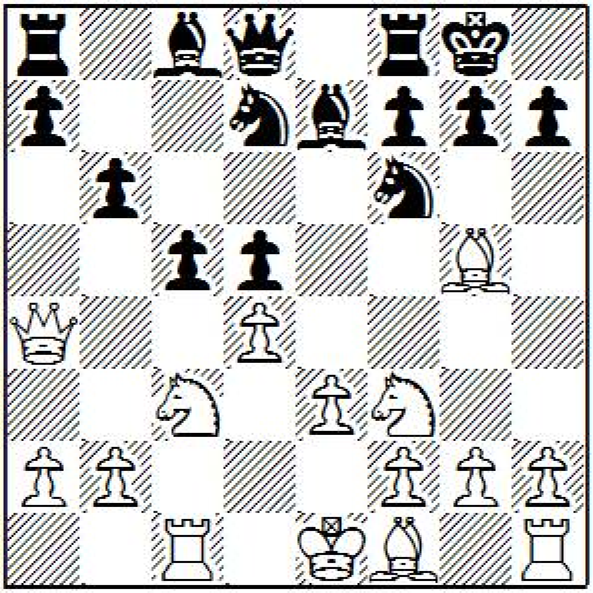
7 ... c6! or 7 ... a6 is objectively better.

8 cxd5 exd5 9 Qa4

The first game went 9 Bb5 (Capablanca’s patent; Pillsbury played 9 Bd3!? – *Game No.38*) 9 ... Bb7 10 Qa4?! (for some reason deviating from the successful 10 0-0 a6 11 Ba4 Rc8 12 Qe2 c5 13 dxc5! Capablanca-Teichmann, Berlin 1913) 10 ... a6! 11 Bxd7 (11 Bc6? b5) 11 ... Nxd7 with an equal game.

9 ... c5!?

‘A bold, risky move, involving a pawn sacrifice.’ (Panov) If 9 ... Bb7 Lasker did not like 10 Ba6! (*Game No.79*).



10 Qc6 Rb8 11 Nxd5 Bb7

11 ... Nxd5!? comes into consideration: 12 Qxd5 Bb7 13 Bxe7 Qxe7 14 Qg5 (14 Qc4 Bxf3 15 gxf3 Rfd8!?) 14 ... Qxg5 15 Nxg5 cxd4 (Capablanca suggested 15 ... h6 16 Nf3 Bxf3 17 gxf3 cxd4 18 Rc7 Rfd8) 16

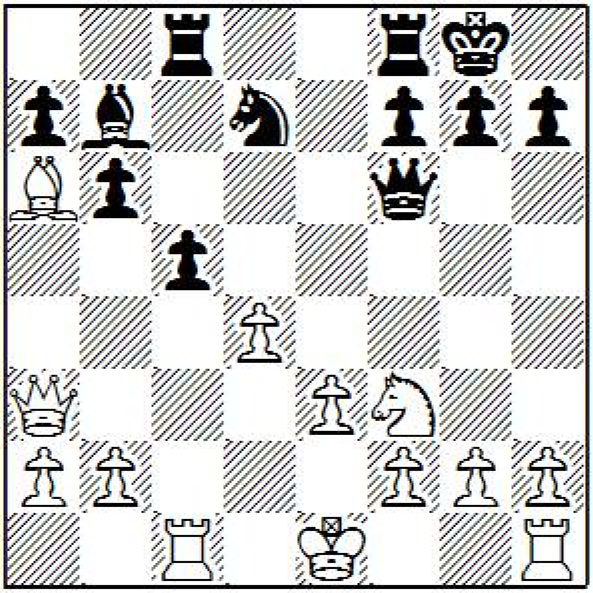
Rd1!? (Euwe; 16 exd4 Nf6! etc.) 16 ... Nf6 17 Rxd4 Rbc8 with counterplay, most probably sufficient for a draw. Lasker chose a more complicated way.

12 Nxe7+ Qxe7 13 Qa4 Rbc8?

Too slow. As Duras pointed out, correct was 13 ... Bxf3! 14 gxf3 cxd4 15 Qxd4 Ne5 16 Be2 Rbd8 17 Qf4 (17 Qc3 Rd5) 17 ... Rd6 with the initiative: 18 0-0?! Rd2! Even if Black did not have 100% compensation for the pawn, this was definitely the best chance.

14 Qa3! Qe6 15 Bxf6! Qxf6 16 Ba6!

With a series of accurate and strong moves Capa has gained an obvious advantage. Here most of his opponents would not have lasted long, but Lasker, though pinned to the wall, only now begins to demonstrate his true strength.



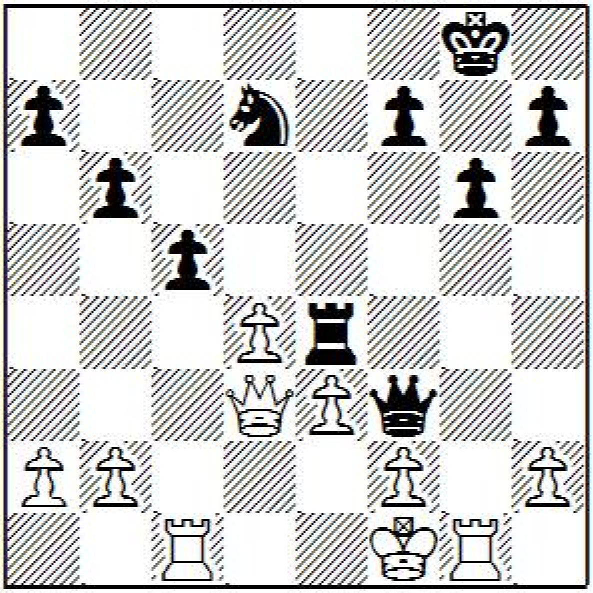
16 ... Bxf3!

This exchange sacrifice is effectively the only chance: bad are both 16 ... Bxa6 17 Qxa6 and 16 ... cxd4 17 Rxc8 Rxc8 18 0-0 Bxa6 19 Qxa6 Rc2 20 Qa4! Rc7 21 Nxd4.

17 Bxc8 Rxc8 18 gxf3 Qxf3 19 Rg1 Re8! (bad is 19 ... Qh3? 20 Qxa7 Qxh2 21 Qxd7 Qxg1+ 22 Ke2! winning) **20 Qd3**

But not 20 Qxa7? Rxe3+.

20 ... g6 21 Kf1 Re4!



Lasker’s tactical resourcefulness is impressive: by giving up the exchange, he has gained definite counterplay instead of a hopeless position. But Capablanca also plays well, accurately parrying the threats and retaining his extra material.

22 Qd1

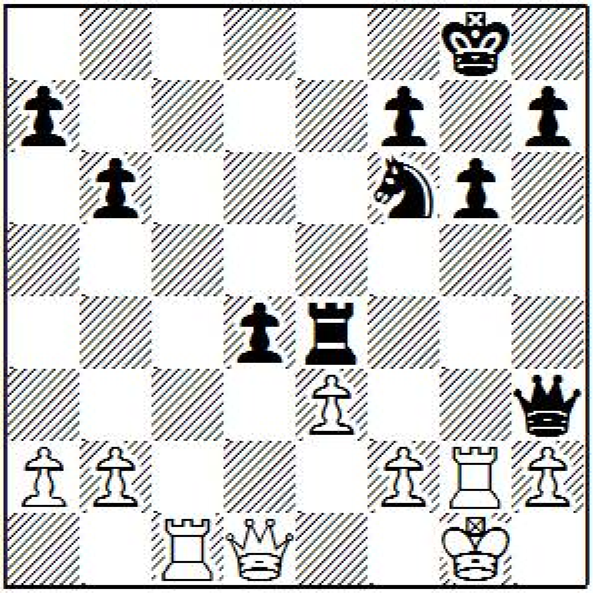
If 22 dxc5 Nxc5 23 Qd5 there can follow 23 ... Qh3+ 24 Rg2 Rg4 25 Kg1 Ne4 26 Rxg4 Qxg4+ 27 Kf1 Qh3+ (but not 27 ... Qf3? 28 Rc8+ Kg7 29 Qe5+ Kh6 30 Qf4+) 28 Ke1 Qg4 with compensation for the material deficit.

22 ... Qh3+ 23 Rg2 Nf6

With the threat of ... Rg4. Less good is 23 ... cxd4?! 24 Rc4!

24 Kg1! cxd4

If 24 ... Rg4?! there is 25 Rg3! (less clear is 25 Qf1 cxd4 26 exd4 Qh4, but not 26 ... Rxd4?? 27 Rxg6+! and Qxh3) 25 ... Rxg3+ 26 hxg3 Ng4 27 Qf3 winning. But now something out of the ordinary is demanded of White.



25 Rc4!

‘Wonderful!’ (Lasker) And this is indeed an excellent defensive move, forcing the exchange of the menacing black rook. After 25 exd4? Nd5! 26 Rg3 Qe6 Black would have had serious compensation for the exchange: for the moment White’s rooks are out of play, his king is exposed, he has a mass of weaknesses, and ... h7-h5-h4 is imminent.

25 ... dxe3 (bad is 25 ... Rg4?! 26 Rc8+ Kg7 27 Rxg4 Nxg4 28 Qxd4+) **26 Rxe4 Nxe4**

Of course, not 26 ... exf2+? 27 Rxf2 Nxe4 28 Qd8+ Kg7 29 Qd4+.

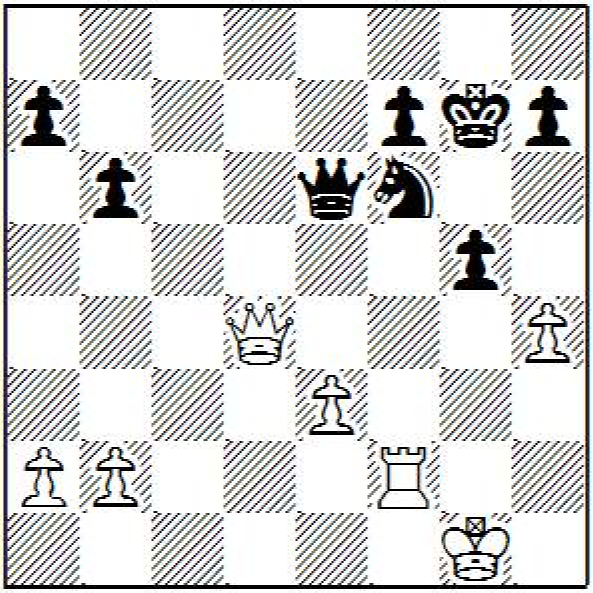
27 Qd8+ Kg7 28 Qd4+ Nf6 29 fxe3!

After 29 Qxe3 Qf5 White’s advantage would have been less.

29 ... Qe6 30 Rf2 g5

To escape from the pin by ... Kg6.

31 h4



31 ... gxh4

It is usual to attach a question mark to this move. ‘31 ... Kg6 was better. Then if 32 hxg5 Ne4 33 Qd3 Qg4+ 34 Rg2 Qh4 35 Qb1 Kg7 the pawn at g5 falls and Black has a good position.’ (Lasker) At first sight here it is indeed impossible to convert the exchange advantage: the white king is exposed, and Black’s queen and knight dominate.

And yet White has a way to gain an advantage: 36 Qd1! (this is stronger than 36 Qf1 Nxg5 37 Qf4 Qe1+ 38 Kh2 h6 39 Rf2) 36 ... Kg6 37 Qf3! (threatening Qf4) 37 ... Nxg5 38 Qg3 with good winning chances. So that 31 ... Kg6 was by no means better than the move in the game.

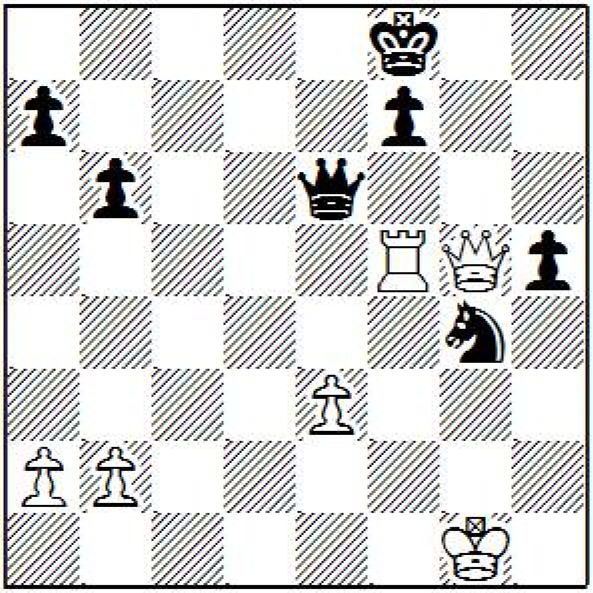
32 Qxh4 Ng4 33 Qg5+ Kf8 34 Rf5

‘34 Rd2! was very strong. 34 ... f6 must be played and Black’s king becomes exposed to attack.’ (Lasker) ‘If 34 ... f6, then 35 Qf4, while if 34 ... Nf6 there follows 35 e4.’ (Panov) Excuse me, but this blunders a pawn (35 ... Qxe4!) – correct is 35 Qf4 with an advantage that is probably sufficient to win, although Black has some saving chances.

34 ... h5!

Making use of the slight respite, Black unexpectedly creates counterplay. ‘Not 34 ... Qxe3+ 35 Qxe3 Nxe3 36 Rf2! and 37 Re2 and White wins.’ (Lasker)

35 Qd8+ Kg7 36 Qg5+ Kf8 37 Qd8+ Kg7 38 Qg5+ Kf8



39 b3?!

After checking to gain time on the clock, Capa makes a move 'by eye', a solid one which, though not noticed by anyone, is not the most accurate. Stronger was 39 Qxh5! Qxe3+ 40 Kg2 Qd2+ 41 Kg3 Nh6 42 Rd5 Qe1+ 43 Kg2 Qe4+ 44 Kf2, and White should win: it is hardly possible for Black to exploit the open position of his king (it can cross to the queenside).

In the match with Lasker, and also earlier, Capablanca got away with this customary unwillingness to make a detailed calculation of 'dangerous' variations, but later it was to let him down in his match with Alekhine.

39 ... Qd6!

A brilliant reply: White is tied down, and he is forced to bring back his queen.

40 Qf4! Qd1+ 41 Qf1 Qd7 42 Rxh5

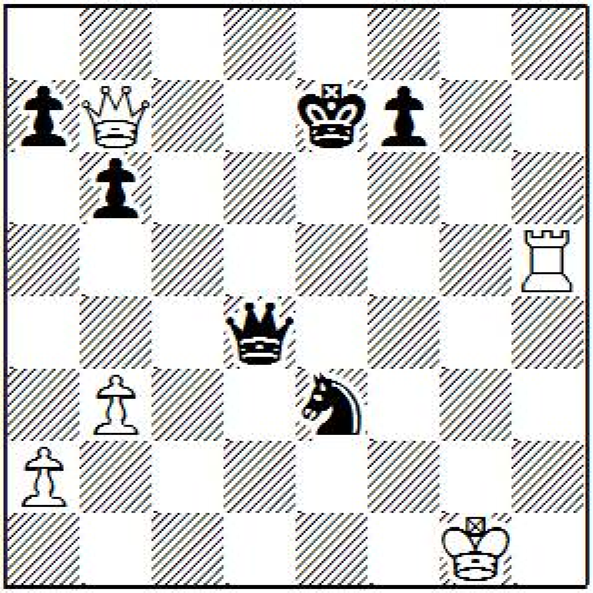
Perhaps 42 Qf3!? was better, but Capa probably thought that in any case his position was won. As a result, although he refuted the exchange sacrifice, he threw away his advantage and won only thanks to a blunder by his opponent. Such slight inaccuracies harboured the germ, as yet hardly visible, of the future defeat of the third world champion ...

42 ... Nxe3 43 Qf3 Qd4!

Amazing resourcefulness. A clear winning plan for White is no longer evident (at least, I have not found a direct win), and some extraordinary measures are required.

44 Qa8+?! (objectively it is wrong to move the queen away, but it is a chance!) **44 ... Ke7 45 Qb7+**

Of course, not 45 Qxa7+? Ke6.



45 ... Kf8??

A great pity: the tired world champion blunders his knight. ‘A terrible mistake. I had a quarter of an hour for thinking, but I was completely incapable of doing so. By 45 ... Ke6 (or 45 ... Kf6) Black would have avoided the exchange of queens.’ (Lasker) And it would indeed be interesting to know how White could have won after 46 Qc6+ Ke7 47 Qf3.

I also like 45 ... Kd6!? For example: 46 Qf3! Nd5+! (inferior is 46 ... f5?! 47 Rh6+ Ke5 48 Qg3+ f4 49 Qg7+ Ke4 50 Re6+ Kd3 51 Qxd4+ Kxd4 52 Kf2) 47 Kh2 f6, again with real drawing chances.

46 Qb8+ 1-0

(46 ... Ke7 47 Qe5+). The challenger took the lead: 3-2.

The next four games took a quiet course, in which Capablanca did not have any advantage. In the sixth game after lengthy manoeuvres Lasker even gained the better of a double-rook endgame, but suddenly he lost a pawn (again a blunder!) and was forced urgently to make a draw. The seventh and eighth games were short draws, and in the ninth the champion gained some advantage this time with Black, but threw it away with one move ...

Lasker’s problem was not the blunders, but the fact that he was quite unable to set the Cuban any real problems. He was evidently affected by the uncustomary Havana climate, and therefore the course of the match did not reflect the true relative strengths of the two players (remember Lasker’s subsequent tournament successes). But we must not belittle Capablanca’s achievement – he could probably have played more strongly, if it had been required. As we shall see, in Buenos Aires 1927, when he was pressed, he began playing quite differently ...

But for the moment the practical challenger was in no hurry to ‘strike while the iron was hot’. And the champion too patiently made draws, in order to play himself in – and then to see whether it might be possible somewhere to catch his languid opponent.

In all probability it was the 10th game that proved the decisive one of the match.

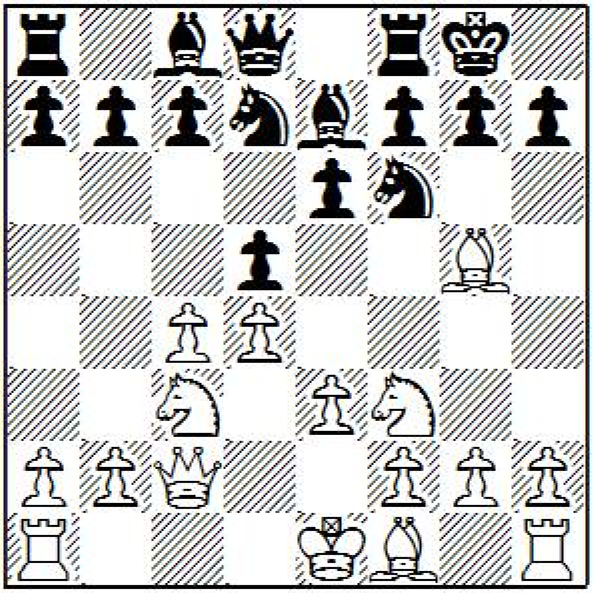
Game 90

Em.Lasker-J.R.Capablanca

World Championship Match, Havana 1921, 10th game

Queen’s Gambit D61

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e3 0-0 6 Nf3 Nbd7 7 Qc2 (the Rubinstein Attack)

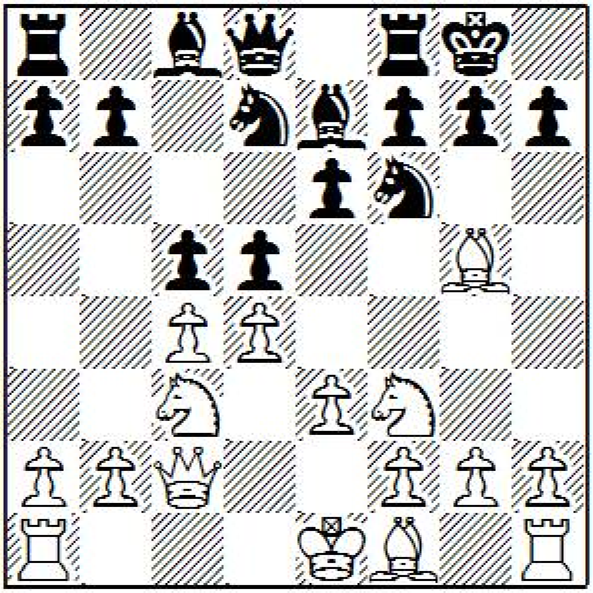


7 ... c5!

More passive is 7 ... b6 (*Game No.60*) or 7 ... c6 (fourth game), when 8 Rd1! is strong.

Rubinstein himself first played 7 ... h6, removing the pawn from attack in the event of 8 Bh4 (8 h4!? c5!) 8 ... c5! 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 11 Nxd5 exd5 12 Bd3?! – now Black has a tempo for 12 ... c4; while if 12 dxc5 Nxc5 13 Be2, then 13 ... Bg4 or 13 ... Be6 is equal.

Therefore in a game with Portisch (Brussels 1986) I risked sacrificing the bishop by 8 cxd5!? Portisch did not accept the challenge, but replied 8 ... exd5, and after 9 Bf4! c5 (9 ... c6 10 0-0-0!) 10 Be2 b6 11 0-0 Bb7 12 Rfd1 Rc8 13 dxc5 bxc5 (13 ... Nxc5 14 Qf5!) 14 a4! Qa5? (14 ... a5 was better) 15 Nh4! Rfd8 16 Nf5 Bf8 17 Nb5 Ne8 (17 ... Ba8 18 Qc3!) 18 Bd6! he ran into difficulties. The variation 8 ... hxg5 9 dxe6 fxe6 10 Ng5 Nb6 11 h4! is hard to evaluate, but in practice Black is not burning with the desire to take such a piece ...



8 Rd1

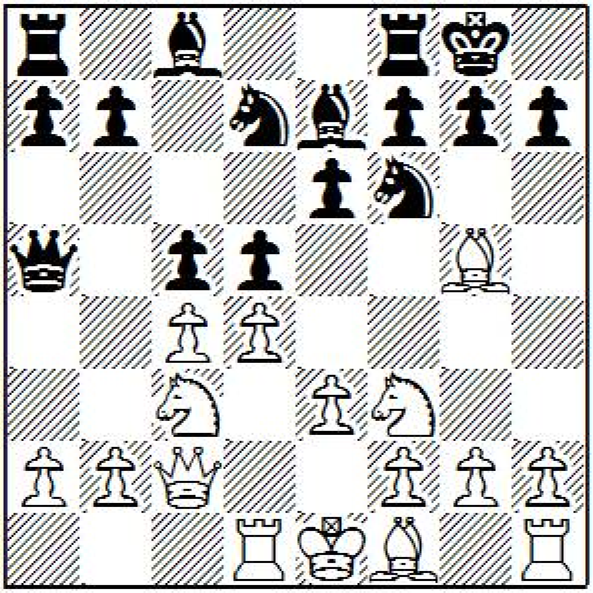
The sharp plan with 8 0-0-0 has lost its popularity due to 8 ... Qa5! 9 cxd5 exd5 10 dxc5 Nxc5 11 Nd4 (it is extremely dangerous to take the d5-pawn) 11 ... Be6 12 Kb1 Rac8 13 Bd3 h6 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Bf5 Rfd8 16 Bxe6 fxe6 17 Qg6 Rd6 with advantage to Black (Rotlewi-Teichmann, Carlsbad 1911).

Many years later, in a game with Fichtl (Prague 1943), Keres played 9 Kb1! and won after 9 ... cxd4 10 exd4 dxc4 11 Bxc4 Nb6 12 Bb3 Bd7 13 Ne5 Rac8 14 Qe2 Nbd5? (14 ... Rfd8 15 h4! and Rh3 is unclear) 15 Nxd5 Nxd5 16 Nxd7! Theory began recommending 9 ... h6 with the idea of 10 Bxf6 Nxf6 11 Ne5 cxd4 12 exd4 Bb4 equalising, and 10 h4 was considered incorrect because of 10 ... cxd4 11 Nxd4 (*? – G.K.*) 11 ... dxc4 12 Bxc4 Nb6 13 Bb3 hxg5! 14 hxg5 Qxg5 15 f4 Qg6.

However, in the game Kasparov-Marovic (Banja Luka 1979) White did in fact play 10 h4!? dxc4 (if 10 ... cxd4, then 11 exd4! hxg5? 12 hxg5 Ne4 13 Nxe4 dxe4 14 c5! with a strong attack) 11 Bxc4 Nb6?! (better is 11 ... cxd4 12 exd4 Nb6 13 Bb3 Bd7 14 Ne5 Rac8 15 Rh3! with chances for both sides) 12 Bxf6 gxf6 (after 12 ... Bxf6 13 Ne4 cxd4 14 Nxf6+ gxf6 15 Rxd4 Nxc4 16 Rg4+! Kh8 17 Rxc4 e5 the pretty 18 Ng5! fxg5 19 hxg5 e4 20 Rc5 Qb4 21 a3! is decisive) 13 Be2 cxd4 14 exd4 Bd7 15 Rh3! with an obvious advantage.

Even so, this bloodthirsty line is dubious, and nowadays White prefers to fight for a small plus: 8 cxd5 Nxd5 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 Nxd5 exd5 11 Bd3 g6 12 dxc5 Nxc5 13 0-0 (13 Rc1 Nxd3+ 14 Qxd3 Bf5! with a rapid draw, Alekhine-Capablanca, Buenos Aires 10th matchgame 1927) 13 ... Bg4 14 Nd4 etc. (a recent example: Nikolic-Piket, Wijk aan Zee 2000).

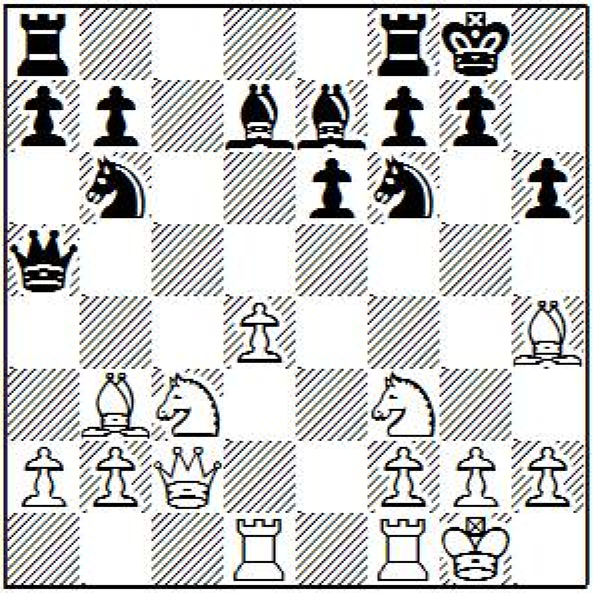
8 ... Qa5



9 Bd3

The seventh game, where Capa was White, went 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Bxe7 Nxe7 11 Bd3 Nf6 12 0-0 cxd4 13 Nxd4 Bd7 14 Ne4 Ned5 15 Nb3 Qd8 16 Nxf6+ Nxf6 17 Qc5 Qb6 18 Rc1 Rfc8 19 Qxb6 axb6 20 Rxc8+ Rxc8 21 Rc1 Rxc1+ 22 Nxc1 Kf8 ½-½.

9 ... h6 10 Bh4 cxd4 (according to Alekhine, 10 ... Nb6! is sounder) **11 exd4 dxc4 12 Bxc4 Nb6 13 Bb3 Bd7 14 0-0**



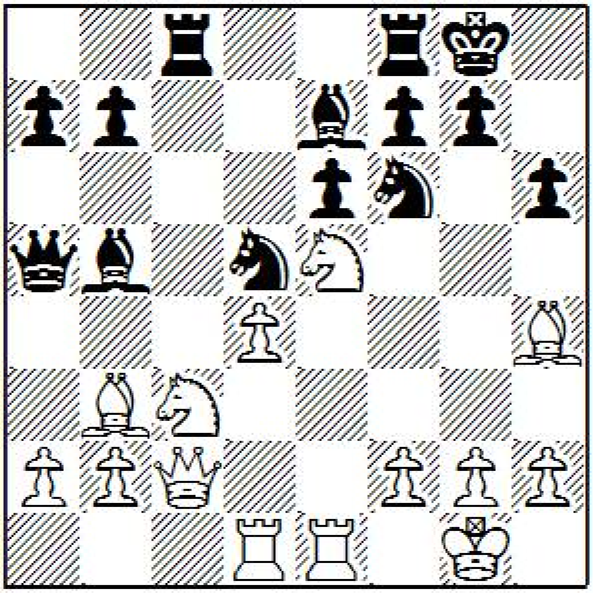
14 ... Rac8

A classic set-up in the spirit of Steinitz (cf. *Game No.18*). Inferior is 14 ... Bc6 15 Ne5 Bd5?! (14 ... Rac8!) 16 Nxd5 Nbxd5 17 Qe2 Rad8 18 f4! Ne8?! 19 Bxe7 Nxe7 20 f5 Nxf5 21 Nxf7! with a decisive attack (Stahlberg-Capablanca, Moscow 1935).

15 Ne5 (Tartakower suggested 15 Qe2!?) **15 ... Bb5**

‘This is a weak move which might have given Black a great deal of trouble. The simple and logical move 15 ... Bc6, threatening ... Bd5, would have given Black an excellent game.’ (Capablanca) Although the aforementioned game against Stahlberg does not confirm this ...

16 Rfe1 Nbd5



The first critical moment. Lasker’s next move shows that the typical methods of playing positions with an isolated d-pawn had not yet been mastered.

17 Bxd5?

A completely unnecessary exchange, denying White all hopes of an advantage (a similar mistake was made by Zukertort – *Game No.18*). Whereas Breyer’s suggestion of 17 Bxf6! Bxf6 (17 ... Nxf6? 18 Ng6! Rfe8 19 Rxe6 wins) 18 Bxd5 exd5 19 Qf5! would have set Black problems:

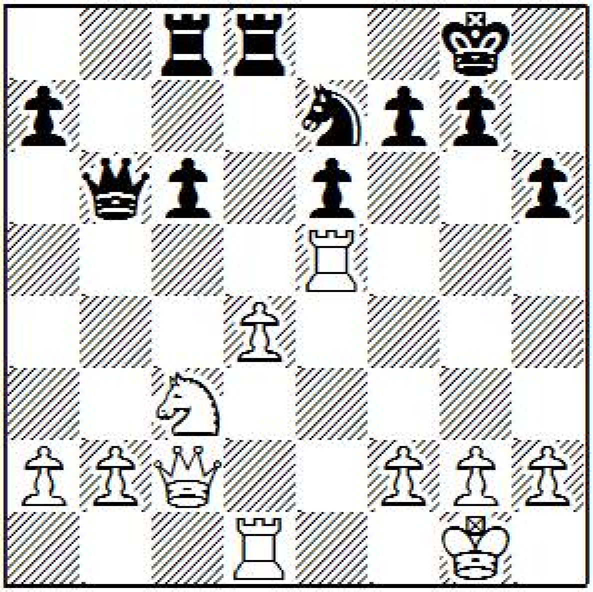
1) 19 ... Bc6 (Bogoljubow) 20 Ng4! (20 Nd7 Bxd7 21 Qxd7 Rfd8! 22 Qf5! Rc4! 23 Nxd5 Qxd5 24 Re8+ Rxe8 25 Qxd5 Rxd4 26 Qf3 Rxd1+ 27 Qxd1 Bxb2 is equal) 20 ... Bg5 21 f4 g6 22 Nf6+! (previously they only considered 22 Qe5?! Rce8 23 Nf6+ Bxf6 24 Qxf6 Qb4! with equal chances) 22 ... Bxf6 (not 22 ... Kg7? 23 Nh5+! Kh7 24 Qe5) 23 Qxf6 with a dangerous initiative;

2) 19 ... Bxe5!? (apparently the best defence) 20 Rxe5 (20 dxe5 Bc4!) 20 ... Bc4 21 a3 Qb6 22 Rd2 with some pressure.

17 ... Nxd5 18 Bxe7 Nxe7 19 Qb3 Bc6 20 Nxc6 bxc6 21 Re5

‘If 21 Na4, then 21 ... Rfd8 (with the threat of ... Rxd4) 22 Re5 Rd5!’ (Panov) Apparently Lasker, true to his match strategy, did not object to a draw, and thought that the weakness on d4 would be offset by the weakness on c6. But, as becomes clear, the d-pawn is weaker and it is not so simple for White to draw.

21 ... Qb6 22 Qc2 Rfd8



23 Ne2?

Too passive! ‘The rook went to e5 to control c5, therefore 23 Na4 was the right move.’ (Lasker) Of course, 23 Na4! is what White should have played (but not 23 Rc5? Rxd4!) – although after 23 ... Qb8 24 Rc5 Nf5 25 Rxc6 Rxc6 26 Qxc6 Nxd4 27 Qe4! e5 Black would have retained a microscopic plus, with accurate play White should nevertheless have been able to draw. Now he has problems.

23 ... Rd5! 24 Rxd5

‘A worse mistake than the previous move. After 24 Re3 Nf5 25 Rb3 Qd8 26 Rb4 White gains time later by Rc4, or Ra4, or g2-g4.’ (Lasker) ‘But after 26 ... Qd7 with the threats of 27 ... e5 or 27 ... Rd8 White has a difficult position.’ (Panov) I should add that 26 Rbd3 is also insufficient in view of 26 ... Qd7 27 b4 Rd8 28 h3 e5! etc.

24 ... cxd5

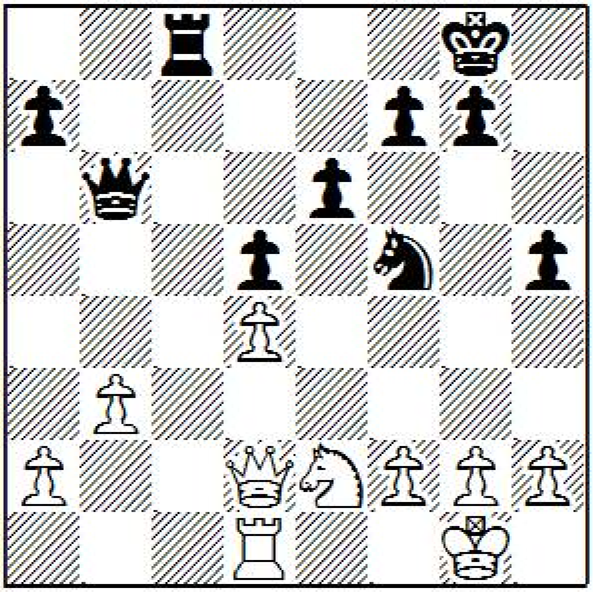
‘From now on the student will do well to study carefully every move up to the end. It is one of Black’s best efforts in his whole career, and that against one of the strongest players the world has ever seen.’ (Capablanca)

25 Qd2 Nf5 26 b3?!

According to Lasker, 26 g3 was better.

26 ... h5

‘To prevent g2-g4 at any time.’ (Capablanca) ‘A hasty move, as a result of which Black almost missed the win. 26 ... g6 should have been played.’ (Panov) But I don’t see what would have changed after 27 Ng3.



27 h3?

‘A completely bad move, allowing Black to paralyse the white pawns.’ (Lasker) ‘Necessary was 27 Ng3! Nxg3 28 hxg3, transposing into a heavy piece endgame with excellent drawing chances.’ (Panov) However, even here after 28 ... Qc7 White, with his weak pawns, would all the same have faced a cheerless defence.

27 ... h4!

After the blockade of the kingside the number of weaknesses in White’s position exceeds the permissible norm, and he is now strategically lost.

28 Qd3 Rc6 29 Kf1 g6 30 Qb1 Qb4 31 Kg1 a5!

‘This decides the outcome. From here and to the end of the game Black plays with merciless consistency. Capablanca’s style is irreproachable.’ (Lasker)

32 Qb2 a4

Giving White yet another weakness – at b3. 33 ... Rb6 and ... axb3 is threatened.

33 Qd2 (an attempt to save himself in the endgame) **33 ... Qxd2 34 Rxd2 axb3 35 axb3 Rb6! 36 Rd3**

But not 36 Rb2? Rb4 winning a pawn.

36 ... Ra6! 37 g4

White can no longer mark time, as otherwise the breakthrough of the rook is decisive: 37 Nc3 Ra1+ 38 Kh2 Rc1 39 b4 Rc2 40 Kg1 Rb2 41 b5 Rb4. But now too Black gradually wins material.

37 ... hxg3 38 fxg3 (or 38 Nxg3 Ra1+ 39 Kg2 Nd6 40 Kf3 Rb1 winning) **38 ... Ra2 39 Nc3 Rc2** (with the threat of ... Nxd4) **40 Nd1 Ne7 41 Nc3 Rc1+ 42 Kf2 Nc6 43 Nd1!**

A pretty trap.

43 ... Rb1!

Avoiding 43 ... Nb4?! 44 Rd2 Rb1 45 Nb2 Rxb2? 46 Rxb2 Nd3+ 47 Ke2 Nxb2 48 Kd2! Kf8 49 Kc2 trapping the knight: 49 ... Nc4 50 bxc4 dxc4 51 Kc3 Ke7 52 Kxc4 draws.

44 Ke2?

Finally White blunders a pawn. Of course, more tenacious was 44 Ke1 Na5 45 Kd2! Rxb3 46 Rxb3 Nxb3+ 47 Kc3 ‘with drawing chances in view of the insignificant amount of material remaining on the board,’ (Panov) although objectively this knight endgame a pawn down is also lost (knight endgames being like pawn endgames!).

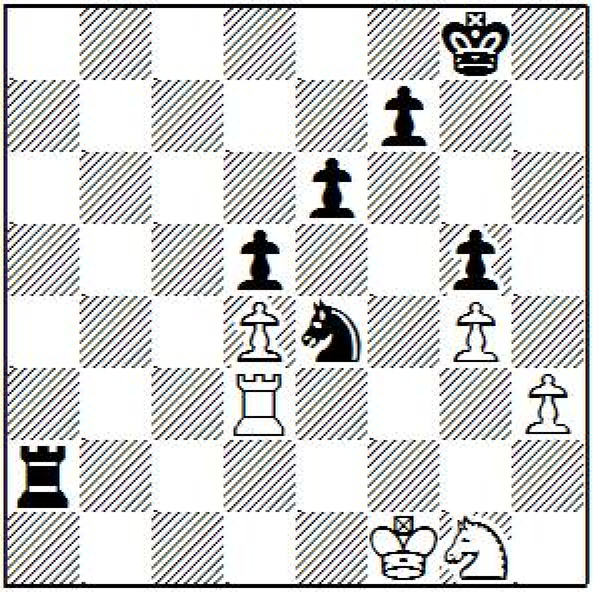
44 ... Rxb3! 45 Ke3 Rb4!

It is clearly simpler to convert the advantage with the rooks on. And in the given instance this simplicity and inevitability, typical of Capa, creates a particular impression, because playing White was the great Lasker!

46 Nc3 Ne7 47 Ne2 Nf5+ 48 Kf2 g5 49 g4 Nd6 50 Ng1 Ne4+ 51 Kf1

Or 51 Kf3 Rb1 52 Ne2 Rf1+ 53 Ke3 Rh1 and wins.

51 ... Rb1+ 52 Kg2 Rb2+ 53 Kf1 Rf2+ 54 Ke1 Ra2 55 Kf1



55 ... Kg7

After tying down the opponent’s pieces, Black activates his king.

56 Re3 Kg6 57 Rd3 f6 58 Re3 Kf7 59 Rd3 Ke7 60 Re3 Kd6 61 Rd3 Rf2+ 62 Ke1 Rg2 63 Kf1 Ra2 64 Re3 e5 65 Rd3 exd4 66 Rxd4 (or 66 Ne2 Kc5 67 Nxd4 Kc4 68 Rd1 Nc3) **66 ... Kc5 67 Rd1 d4 68 Rc1+ Kd5 0-1**

69 Rd1 Ng3+ 70 Ke1 Rg2 wins.

This heavy defeat with White was the last straw for the champion. Of course, Lasker did not play as well as he could have done, but he had not previously encountered such an iron grip. Others used to give Lasker chances, but not Capa! And Lasker, that great psychologist, had to become accustomed to this sort of play, and try to find an antidote to it. But in his condition during the match in Havana he was unable to find the solution to this problem.

In the 11th game Lasker resorted to extreme measures – he drew the enemy fire, playing the opening deliberately passively, *à la* Steinitz. Diverging from the rules, he sharply upset the positional balance and exceeded the bounds of acceptable risk. He had also used this method before: it didn’t matter about the position, the main thing was to retain as many pieces as possible!

But this decision proved to be radically flawed: it was as though Capablanca had been awaiting such a turn of events. He joined battle, seized space and began relentlessly suffocating his opponent.

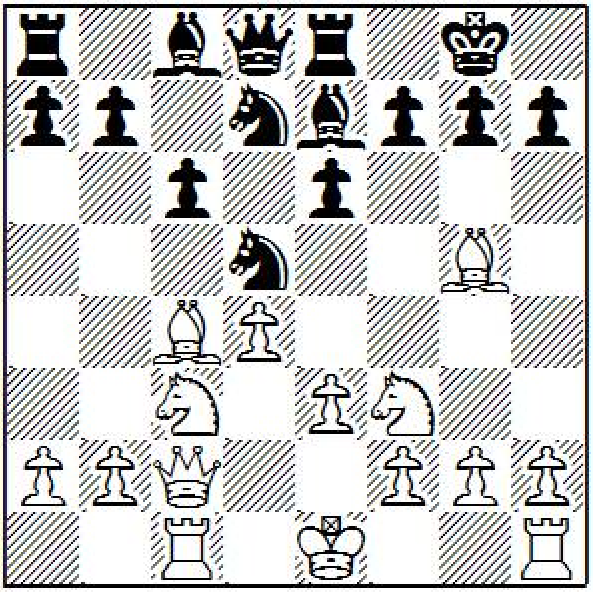
Game 91

J.R.Capablanca-Em.Lasker

World Championship Match, Havana 1921, 11th game

Queen's Gambit D63

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 e6 3 c4 Nf6 4 Bg5 Nbd7 5 e3 Be7 6 Nc3 0-0 7 Rc1 Re8?! (7 ... c6!) **8 Qc2! c6 9 Bd3** (9 a3!?) **9 ... dxc4 10 Bxc4 Nd5**



On one occasion Capablanca himself was unsuccessful with 10 ... b5?! (*Game No.82*).

11 Bxe7 (11 Ne4 Qa5+!, but 11 Bf4!? Nxf4 12 exf4 is interesting) **11 ... Rxe7?!**

The normal course would be 11 ... Qxe7 12 0-0 Nxc3 13 Qxc3 e5 with hopes of equality and a draw.

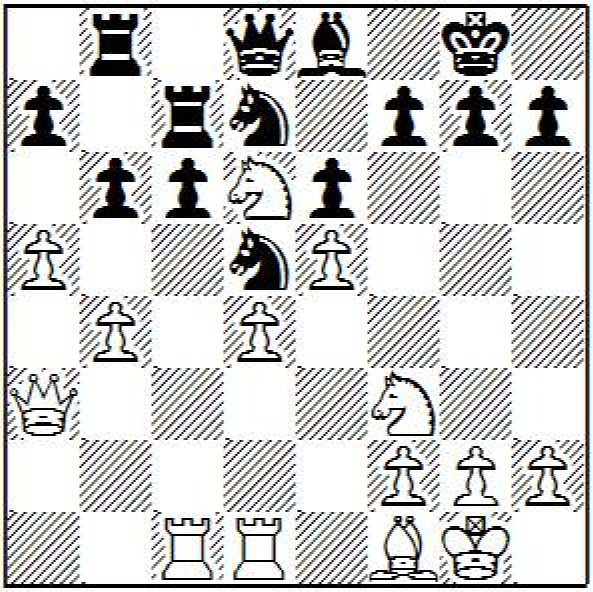
12 0-0 Nf8?! (12 ... Nxc3 13 Qxc3 b6 was nevertheless better) **13 Rfd1 Bd7 14 e4 Nb6?!** (14 ... Nxc3) **15 Bf1 Rc8 16 b4! Be8**

'The defensive position is Steinitzian in its character, with most of the pieces massed on the last two rows. There are no weak points in Black's game, but his position suffers from lack of space for his pieces to manoeuvre.' (Capablanca)

17 Qb3 Rec7 18 a4 Ng6 19 a5 Nd7 20 e5

White methodically increases his spatial advantage, opening the way for his knight to d6.

20 ... b6 21 Ne4 Rb8 22 Qc3 (the immediate 22 Qa3! is more accurate, not allowing Black a tempo for ... Ng6-f4-d5) **22 ... Nf4 23 Nd6 Nd5 24 Qa3**

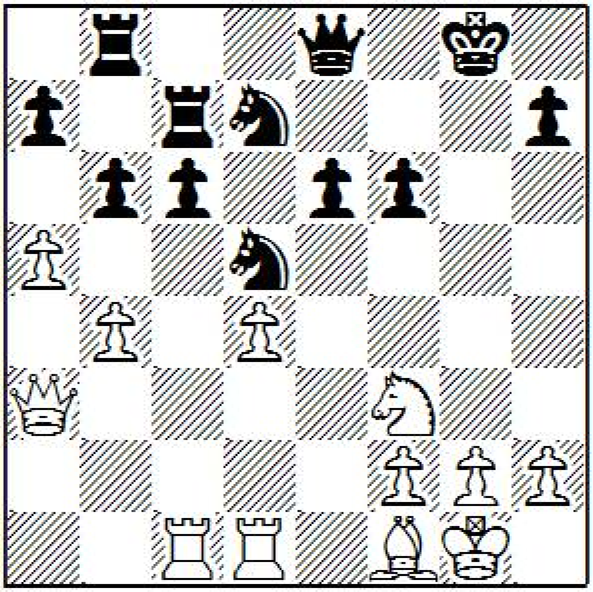


24 ... f6

With the correct idea of ... Bh5, but Levenfish and Panov recommended first 24 ... Qe7! (to answer Nxe8 with ... Rxe8, keeping the b4-pawn under fire). This would appear to be more accurate, for example: 25 Bc4!? (with the threat of Bxd5 and Nb5) 25 ... Nf8 26 Ba2 f6 etc.

25 Nxe8! Qxe8 26 exf6 gxf6

26 ... N7xf6?! 27 Ne5 was dubious. After parting with his powerful knight without regrets, White has transformed his advantage: now Black's king is open, which with the queens on will sooner or later make itself felt.



27 b5

Perhaps 27 Bc4!? was better. But the move in the game, which is often accompanied by an exclamation mark, is also quite logical: ‘The exposed position of the black king is rather inviting for an attack, but before going into it White must liquidate his queenside pawns in order to remove all possible sources of weakness. Once those two pawns are exchanged, White can devote all his attention to the attack against the king without having anything to worry about on the other side.’ (Capablanca)

27 ... Rbc8!

The most tenacious defence. ‘Here 27 ... c5 would be met by 28 dxc5 bxc5 29 Bc4 and Black’s position would be untenable.’ (Capablanca) But stronger here is 28 ... Nxc5! 29 Nd4 Rbc8 with an unclear game. Therefore 28 axb6 axb6 29 Bc4! is correct, ‘and Black’s position collapses.’ (Panov)

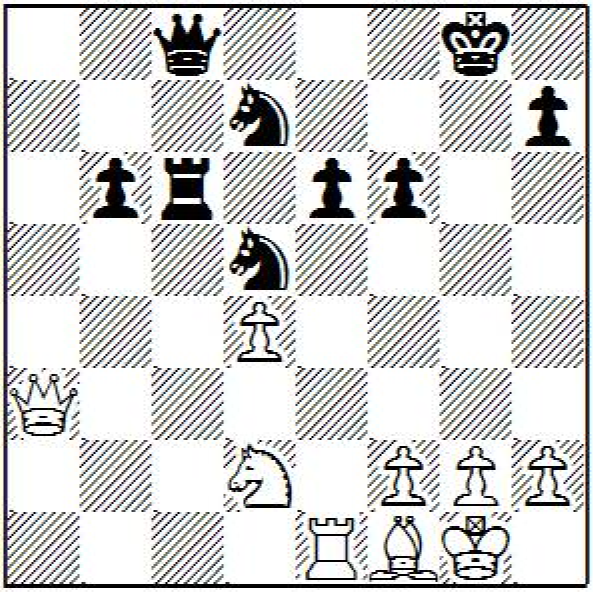
Also bad was 27 ... cxb5?! 28 Rxc7 Nxc7 29 Qd6 Rc8 (29 ... Nd5 30 Bxb5) 30 d5! e5 (30 ... exd5 31 Re1!) 31 axb6 axb6 32 Bd3 with a decisive attack.

28 bxc6 Rxc6 29 Rxc6 Rxc6 30 axb6 axb6

After the exchanges on the queenside Black has nevertheless gained some counterplay on the c-file and hopes of an acceptable endgame.

31 Re1 Qc8 (if 31 ... Qf8, then 32 Qb3) **32 Nd2!**

The time has come to activate the knight.



32 ... Nf8?!

‘Better is 32 ... Rc3! 33 Qa1 Nf8 34 Ne4 Rc7, gaining an important tempo.’ (Lasker) I agree: after 35 g3 White has a marked advantage, but even so not as great as in the game. Incidentally, many recommended 33 Qd6 (instead of 33 Qa1!) 33 ... Nf8 (33 ... Rc6?! 34 Qg3+ Kh8 35 Ne4!) 34 Ne4 Rc6 35 Qa3, overlooking 34 ... Rc1! with the exchange of rooks and a probable draw.

33 Ne4 Qd8 34 h4!

Preventing ... f6-f5.

34 ... Rc7

Playing the rook onto the seventh rank leads to the conceding of the c-file. Bad was 34 ... f5?! 35 Qg3+! Kh8 36 Qe5+ Kg8 37 Bb5 Rc7 38 Ng5 Re7 39 Bc4 Ng6 40 Qg3 winning. In Capablanca’s opinion, the best chance was 34 ... h6!? with the threat of driving back the knight by ... f6-f5. In any event, the black king’s shelter is insecure.

35 Qb3 Rg7! 36 g3 Ra7 37 Bc4 Ra5

Not falling for 37 ... h6? 38 Bxd5 exd5 39 Qxd5+! Qxd5 40 Nxf6+ Kf7 41 Nxd5 winning.

38 Nc3!

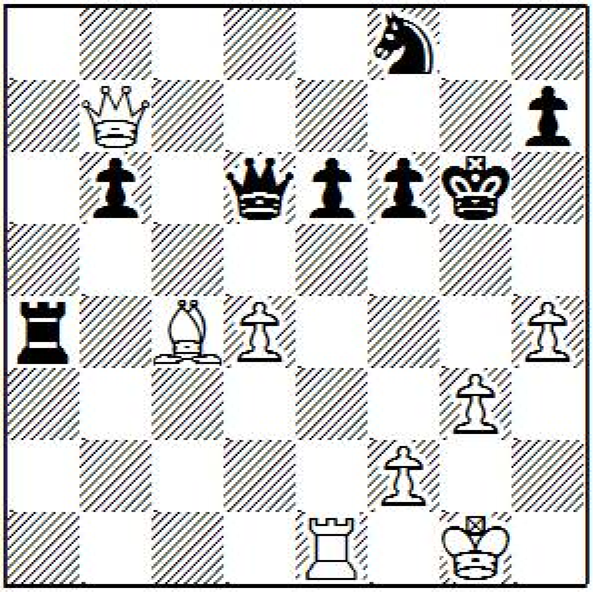
After the exchange of the key knight at d5 Black’s weaknesses will be indefensible.

38 ... Nxc3 39 Qxc3 Kf7 40 Qe3 Qd6 41 Qe4 Ra4?

‘Suicide!’ (Lasker) ‘The same losing picture as in the previous games of this match! Initially the world champion plays the opening carelessly and finds himself in an inferior position, then by skilful defence he achieves an almost drawn position, but in the end, worn out by his indefatigable opponent, he begins to make mistakes. 41 ... Ra7 42 d5 e5 was correct, although even then the manoeuvre Bc4-f1-h3 would have retained the advantage for White.’ (Panov)

42 Qb7+ Kg6

If 42 ... Qe7, then 43 Qc6 Ra7 44 d5. Slightly more tenacious was 42 ... Kg8 43 Qc8 Kf7 44 d5 e5 45 Bb5 Rd4 46 Qb7+ Kg8 47 Ra1 and White wins.



43 Qc8?

It is surprising that none of the commentators has pointed out a pretty forced win: 43 h5+! Kh6 44 Qf7 Qd8 45 Bd3! Rxd4 46 Rxe6, and if 46 ... Rxd3 47 Rxf6+ Kg5 48 Qg7+ Ng6 49 Rxg6+.

It would not have been so difficult for Capablanca to work out the combination, but ... again what told was his inclination towards play on general grounds. In Havana 1921 this had no significance: his minor flaws went unnoticed, because Lasker did not exploit them. Before Alekhine, no one could force Capa to really work! And the latter, naturally, was accustomed to winning with little effort. However, in Buenos Aires 1927 this habit was to cost the Cuban dearly ...

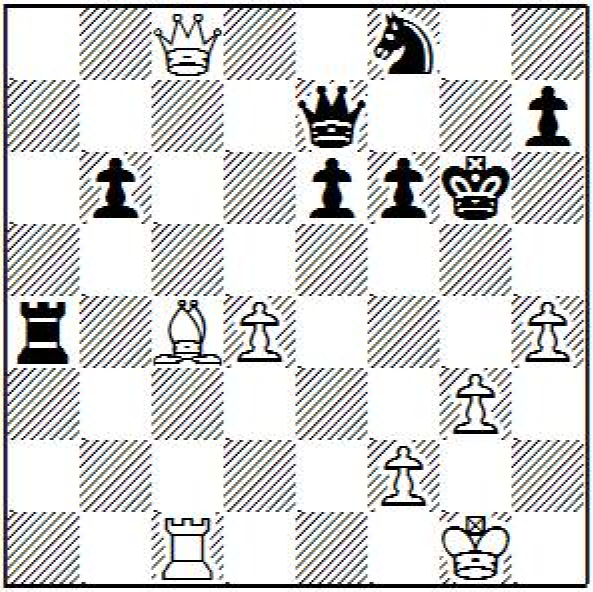
43 ... Qb4?

Alas, Lasker promptly makes a mistake in reply, allowing his opponent to conclude the game spectacularly. After 43 ... Ra7! White would have had to win the game anew: 44 Qe8+ (44 Bxe6?! Nxe6 45 Rxe6 Qxd4 is level) 44 ... Kg7! etc.

44 Rc1! Qe7?!

If 44 ... Qa3 Capa gives 45 Bd3+ f5 (45 ... Qxd3? 46 Qe8+; 45 ... Kh6? 46 Rc7 with the threat of 47 Qxf8+ Qxf8 48 Rxh7 mate) 46 Qe8+ Kh6 47 Re1 (the computer prefers 47 Rc7!? Rxd4 48 Be2 Ng6 49 Qg8 and wins) 47 ... Ra8 48 Rxe6+ Nxe6 49 Qxe6+ Kg7 50 Qe5+ with mate.

Meanwhile the best defence was still 44 ... Ra7!, after which White would have had a pleasant choice between 45 Bxe6 Nxe6 46 Qxe6 Qxd4 47 Rc4 Qe5 48 Rg4+ Kh6 49 Qxb6 and 45 d5!? Qd2 46 Bb3.



45 Bd3+! Kh6 (after 45 ... f5, apart from the sharp 46 Bxf5+, there is also the cold 46 Rc7) **46 Rc7 Ra1+ 47 Kg2 Qd6 48 Qxf8+! 1-0**

‘This game shows Capablanca’s style in its most favourable light: energetic, but cautious play, striving to create a sound position, from which it is easy to launch an attack.’ (Lasker)

The score became +3 in Capablanca’s favour, and after two draws things came to a head: by blundering (again) the champion lost the 14th game, which he had begun quite well, and ... on the advice of his doctor he resigned the match. ‘Towards the end of the fourth hour, just before the time control, I was almost exhausted and with several obvious errors I ruined my entire strategic plan,’ Lasker lamented. ‘I was looking at the board as though through a mist, and my head ached suspiciously. This was a warning to me, and I heeded it.’

And so, Capablanca won ahead of schedule with a score of 9-5 (+4 =10) and became the third world champion in the history of chess. It can only be regretted that this match was played in Havana, and not somewhere in the USA or Europe, in a climate to which Lasker was accustomed. Then he would not have committed the blunders that were so atypical of him ... However, it is probable that even in this case the Cuban’s chances would have been somewhat better.

The wise Lasker endured his defeat with enviable dignity and generosity. In his final report from the match, and in a small book *Mein Wettkampf mit Capablanca* that was soon published, he paid tribute to his opponent:

‘Capablanca’s play set me genuine problems. His games are clear, logical and strong. In them there is nothing hidden, artificial or laboured ... Although they are transparent, they are by no means banal and are often deep. Capablanca does not like unclear positions and gambles. He likes to know beforehand where he is going. The depth of his play is the depth of a mathematician, not of a poet. He has the soul of a Roman, not of a Greek ...

‘Is Capablanca the ideal, the ultimate chess champion? I don’t think so. But he deserves the title of world champion. His style is extremely distinctive, accurate and inventive, logical and energetic ... When Steinitz lost the last game of the match to me, he stood up and exclaimed: ‘Three hurrahs for the new world champion!’ These words touched me. The debt of honour obliges me to address the chess world with the same words.’

Nimzowitsch and Hypermodernism

Under the influence of the series of draws in the Havana match, both players began talking about the threat of a drawing death in chess. ‘The game of chess is approaching perfection,’ wrote Lasker. ‘From it the elements of play and uncertainty are disappearing. In our time too much is known; there is not, therefore, the need to guess, as we, the older masters, had to do in the days of our youth. Regrettable though it is, knowledge entails death. I have always been opposed to research. But Pillsbury began studying the openings as far as the most clear conclusions, and his method triumphed. Now all players know the best opening moves of the Queen's Gambit or the Ruy Lopez and feel at home in them ... The charm of the unknown has disappeared.'

And later: 'Of course, chess will not keep its secrets for long. The fatal hour of this ancient game is approaching. In its modern form this game will soon die a drawing death – the inevitable victory of certainty and mechanisation will leave its stamp on the fate of chess. Then new rules will have to be devised ... '

Capablanca also thought that within 10-15 years any 'good player will be able to draw any game' and he also thought about the reform of chess. He suggested increasing the board to 100 squares and in 1929 he even played with Maróczy an endlessly lengthy exhibition game on a board of 192 squares ... As Alekhine joked, 'such projects are always put forward by players who have lost the world championship.'

In fact the fears of Lasker and Capablanca were a vivid illustration of the relative nature of human knowledge. Yes, they were the kings of the chess in which after 1 e4 they largely played 1 ... e5, less frequently 1 ... e6 and altogether rarely 1 ... c5, and after 1 d4 – almost exclusively 1 ... d5, restricting themselves to the Queen's Gambit Declined or Accepted. On this little 'chess island' they had raised technique to unprecedented heights, and it seemed to them that there was nowhere further to go.

However, with the years both champions saw that the territory of chess was far wider and that it was still a long way from exhausting all its possibilities. A considerable role here was played by the new trend of chess thinking, called 'hypermodernism'. Its pillars were Nimzowitsch, Réti and Breyer, and its supporters – Alekhine, Bogoljubow, Tartakower, Grünfeld ... This important stage in the development of chess theory is something that we must dwell on in some detail.

The great chess theoretician and innovator Aron Nimzowitsch (1886-1935), who originated from Riga and lived in Copenhagen, substantially refined and expanded the operation of Steinitz's principles, by putting forward on their basis a number of truly revolutionary ideas. He began his researches with a sharp criticism of some of Tarrasch's dogmas. 'Steinitz had perhaps only one deficiency: he was ahead of his generation by at least 50 years!' declared Nimzowitsch in an article with the provocative title 'Does Dr Tarrasch's *Die moderne Schachpartie* correspond to the modern understanding of the game?' (1913)

I would remind you that Tarrasch and his numerous followers rated the role of central pawns in the opening excessively highly. For example, in the French Defence after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 or 3 Nd2 (Tarrasch's move) they severely criticised 3 ... dxe4. But Nimzowitsch retorted: 'This method of play has already been assiduously and lovingly cultivated for more than 20 years, in spite of all the purists and screams about the surrender of the centre. Moreover, with the move ... b7-b6 (Rubinstein) an improvement has been found which has cast doubts on the value of 3 Nc3 and persuaded me to resurrect 3 e5, with which I, as is known, have gained great successes – again in spite of all the purists!'

And here the author gave the philosophical basis of this variation: 'White switches the attack from d5 to e6, which he fixes by e4-e5, in accordance with the rule: 'an object of attack must first be made immobile.' There arises a pawn chain, restricting the free manoeuvring of both sides. Naturally, one wants to break it up. With this aim the base of the chain must be attacked: Black – d4 (by ... c7-c5), and White – e6 (by f2-f4-f5)' etc.

But Tarrasch was actively opposed to the move 3 e5 here! It need hardly be said how critical and fierce was the following duel between the most prominent theoreticians of their time.

Game 92

A.Nimzowitsch-S.Tarrasch

San Sebastian 1912

French Defence C02

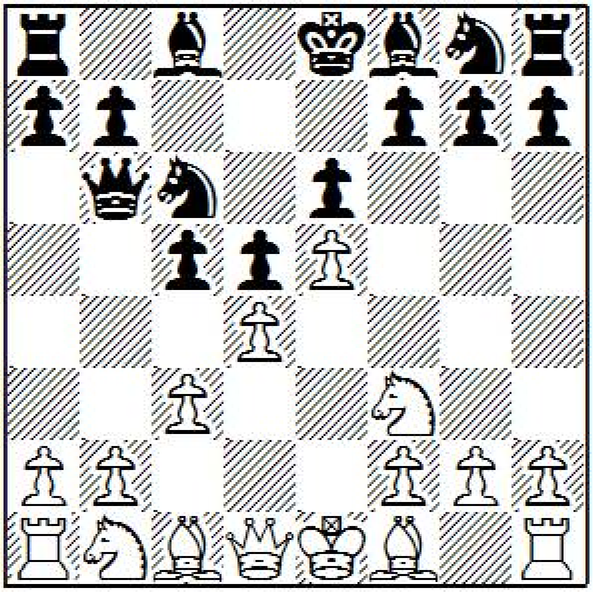
1 e4 c5 2 c3 e6 3 d4 d5 4 e5!?

After the normal move order 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 apart from 4 c3 Nimzowitsch also tried the rare plans 4 Nf3 cxd4 5 Qxd4 Nc6 6 Qf4, 4 dxc5 Nc6 5 Nf3 Bxc5 6 Bd3 and 4 Qg4 cxd4 5 Nf3, explaining: 'I am not really a gambit player, but in my opinion the sustained policy of restraint (i.e. 3 e5) is worth a pawn.'

In the 1930s 4 Nf3 Nc6!? 5 Bd3!? cxd4 6 0-0 was also played, but this went out of fashion after 6 ... Bc5 (6 ... f6!? Alekhine-Euwe, Nottingham 1936) 7 Nbd2 (7 Bf4!?) 7 ... Nge7 8 a3 (8 Nb3 Bb6 9 Bf4 Ng6 equalises, Levenfish-Botvinnik, Moscow/Leningrad 9th matchgame 1937) 8 ... Ng6 9 Nb3 Bb6 10 Re1 Bd7 11 g3 f6! with an excellent game for Black (Bondarevsky-Botvinnik, Leningrad/Moscow 1941).

4 ... Nc6 (4 ... Bd7 5 Nf3 Qb6 with the idea of ... Bb5 is also of topical interest) **5 Nf3 Qb6**

Earlier this move was made automatically, but nowadays 5 ... Nge7, 5 ... Nh6 or 5 ... Bd7 is often played, avoiding the variation 5 ... Qb6 6 a3. For example: 5 ... Bd7 6 Be2 Nge7 7 Na3 cxd4 8 cxd4 Nf5 9 Nc2 Nb4 10 0-0! (10 Ne3 Nxe3 11 fxe3 Be7 12 a3 Nc6 13 b4 a6 14 Rb1 Na7! 15 a4 Nc6 16 Bd2 a5 17 b5 Nb4 is equal, Spassky-Korchnoi, Belgrade 18th matchgame 1977/78; 10 Nxb4 Bxb4+ 11 Bd2 Qb6!) 10 ... Nxc2 11 Qxc2 Rc8 12 Qd3 (12 Qb3 Qb6!) 12 ... Qb6 (12 ... a6!?) 13 a4 (13 Bd2 Bb4!) 13 ... Bb4 14 h4 h6 15 h5 Ne7 with complicated play (Sveshnikov-Rublevsky, Elista 1994).

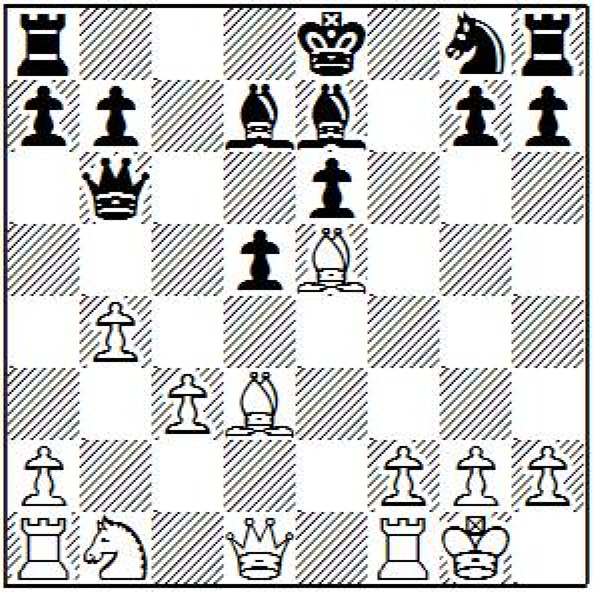


6 Bd3?!

The first steps of theory. 'More natural would have been 6 Be2, for the d4-pawn is the "base", and as such should be protected as thoroughly as possible.' (Nimzowitsch)

6 ... cxd4!

An accurate reply. 6 ... Bd7?! 7 dxc5! Bxc5 8 0-0 favours White, as was shown by the classic game Nimzowitsch-Salwe (Carlsbad 1911): 8 ... f6?! (8 ... a5 is better, but not 8 ... Nge7? 9 b4 winning) 9 b4! Be7 10 Bf4 fxe5 11 Nxe5 Nxe5 12 Bxe5. A complete piece blockade of the centre:



Analysis diagram

12 ... Nf6 (bad is 12 ... Bf6? 13 Qh5+ g6 14 Bxg6+ hxg6 15 Qxg6+ Ke7 16 Bxf6+ Nxf6 17 Qg7+) 13 Nd2! 0-0 14 Nf3! Bd6 (14 ... Bb5? 15 Bd4 Qa6 16 Bxb5 Qxb5 17 Ng5!) 15 Qe2 Rac8 16 Bd4 Qc7 17 Ne5 Be8 18 Rae1 Bxe5 19 Bxe5 Qc6 20 Bd4! Bd7 21 Qc2 Rf7 22 Re3! b6 23 Rg3 Kh8 24 Bxh7! e5!? (24 ... Nxh7 25 Qg6!) 25 Bg6 Re7 26 Re1 Qd6 27 Be3 d4 28 Bg5 Rxc3 29 Rxc3 dxc3 30 Qxc3 ... 1-0.

7 cxd4 Bd7! 8 Be2

White is forced to waste a tempo on the defence of the d4-pawn. Steinitz and Maróczy tried 8 Bc2, but after 8 ... Nb4 White has no advantage, as I found out for myself back in my childhood, at the schoolchildren's Spartakiad in Alma Ata (1974), playing Black against Gabrilyavichus (where, incidentally, it was also a Sicilian with 2 c3).

Therefore since the mid-20th century 6 Bd3 has been played more for the sake of 8 0-0 (the Milner-Barry Gambit) 8 ... Nxd4 9 Nxd4 Qxd4 10

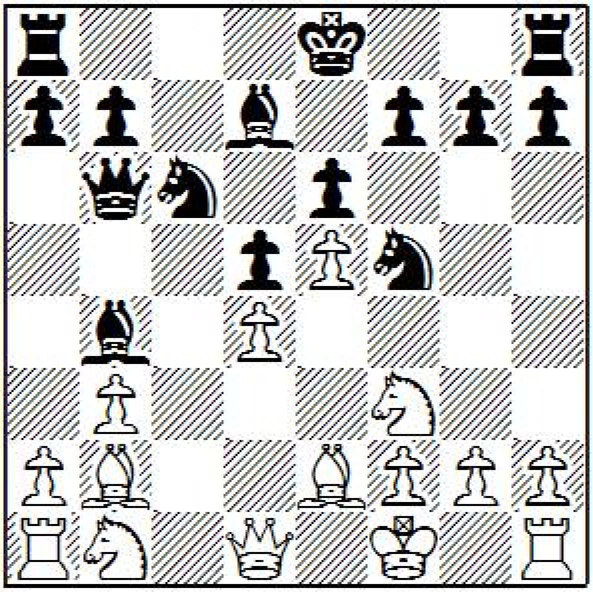
Nc3, although after the continuation 10 ... a6! (also 10 ... Qxe5 11 Re1 Qb8 12 Nxd5 Bd6) it is hard for White to develop sufficient initiative to compensate for his material deficit.

8 ... Nge7 9 b3?!

Too passive. At the finish of the same tournament, Nimzowitsch played 9 Na3 against Duras, and after 9 ... Ng6?! 10 0-0 Be7 11 Nc2 f6 12 Bd3 0-0-0 13 b4 (13 Re1!?) he retained some advantage. Of course, better is 9 ... Nf5 10 Nc2 Nb4 – compared with the variations considered above with 5 ... Bd7 Black has an extra tempo (his queen is already at b6) and at least an equal game.

9 ... Nf5 10 Bb2 Bb4+ 11 Kf1

Because of the pressure on d4, White is deprived of the right to castle. By present-day French measures his position is simply worse: the ‘stupid’ bishop at b2 plus the threat of ... f7-f6 and the opening of the f-file. However, Nimzowitsch believed in the magical power of the over-protected pawn centre ...



11 ... Be7

Apparently White would have been satisfied with 11 ... h5 12 g3 Rc8 13 Kg2 g6 14 h3 (Nimzowitsch-Rubinstein, Carlsbad 1911). But Black has no reason to support his knight. According to Nimzowitsch, the most accurate is 11 ... 0-0! 12 Bd3 f6! 13 Bxf5 exf5 with the advantage of the two bishops, or 12 g4?! Nh6 13 Rg1 f6! 14 exf6 Rxf6 15 g5 Rxf3! with a strong initiative: 16 Bxf3 (*or 16 gxh6 Rf7 17 Rxg7+ Rxg7 18 hxg7 Qc7 19 Kg2 Be8 – G. K.*) 16 ... Nf5 17 Rg4 Be8 (17 ... Rf8!?) 18 Qe2 (*? – G. K.*) 18 ... Ncxd4 19 Rxd4 Nxd4 20 Qe5 Bb5+ 21 Kg2 Nf5 22 Bxd5 (*more tenacious is 22 Bg4 d4 23 Bxf5 exf5 – G. K.*) 22 ... exd5 23 Qxf5 Rf8 24 Qxd5+ Rf7! 25 Qd4 Bc5 and White must resign. And after 11 ... Be7 too he has an uneasy position.

12 g3 (12 g4? Nh4!) **12 ... a5**

Tarrasch attached an exclamation mark to this move (and also to the previous one), whereas Nimzowitsch gave it a question mark: ‘In order to exploit the new “weakness”, White’s b3-pawn (*again Steinitz’s dogmas! – G. K.*). The only pity is that this point is no weakness; he should have gone for the weak king’s position.’

Indeed, after 12 ... 0-0 13 Bd3 (13 Kg2 f6!) 13 ... f6! 14 Bxf5 exf5 Black has a comfortable position – the dream of any French player. For Botvinnik this would already be obvious, like two times two!

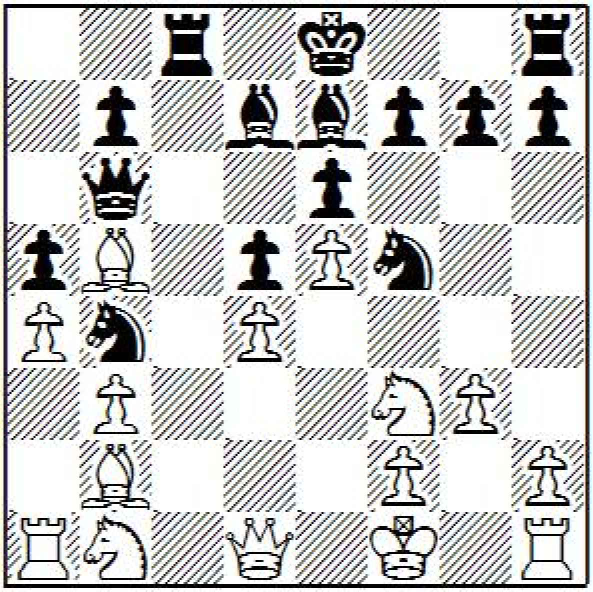
However, the two players were conducting a principled opening dispute, for the time being repeating the old game L. Paulsen-Tarrasch (Nuremberg 1888).

13 a4 Rc8

The inclusion of ... a7-a5 and a2-a4 does not play any particular role (Black has weakened his b5-square, and White his b4-square), and therefore 13 ... 0-0 and 14 ... f6! was again logical.

14 Bb5! Nb4?!

‘14 ... 0-0 was very bad because of 15 Bd3!, and Black cannot take on d4.’ (Tarrasch) He does not need to take – after 15 ... f6! he is perfectly alright.



15 Nc3!

An improvement! Paulsen played 15 Bxd7+?! Kxd7 16 Nc3 Nc6! 17 Nb5 Na7! 18 Nxa7? (18 Qd3 Nxb5 19 axb5 with level chances was essential) 18 ... Qxa7 19 Qd3, and after 19 ... Qa6! 20 Qxa6 bxa6 21 Kg2 Rc2 22 Bc1 Rb8 23 Rb1 Rc3 24 Bd2 Rcxb3 25 Rxb3 Rxb3 26 Bxa5 Rb2! (but not 26 ... Ra3? 27 Rc1!) 27 Bd2 (27 Rc1 Ne3+ and ... Nc4) 27 ... Bb4! 28 Bf4 h6 (28 ... Ra2!?) 29 g4 Ne7 30 Ra1 Nc6 31 Bc1 Rc2 Black won an instructive endgame.

15 ... Na6?!

A dubious manoeuvre. In his famous *Dreihundert Schachpartien* (1895, 1909), Tarrasch suggested 15 ... Bxb5+ 16 Nxb5 Nc2 ‘with the threat of ... Ne3+’, but Nimzowitsch had prepared a refutation: 17 Rc1 Nce3+ 18 fxe3 Nxe3+ 19 Ke2 Nxd1 20 Rxc8+ Kd7 21 Rxh8 Nxb2 22 Rc1 winning. On noticing this, Black diverged, but better was 15 ... Bxb5+ 16 Nxb5 0-0! (instead of 16 ... Nc2?) 17 Rc1 (17 Kg2? Nc2) 17 ... Rc6 18 Kg2 Rfc8 19 Re1 Na2 (19 ... Na6 is unclear) 20 Ra1 Nb4, immediately forcing a draw.

One of White’s problems is the ‘stupidity’ of his bishop at b2 and, despite all Nimzowitsch’s optimism, he has nothing in particular. It can rather be said that in this game the old dogma was inferior to the new dogma ...

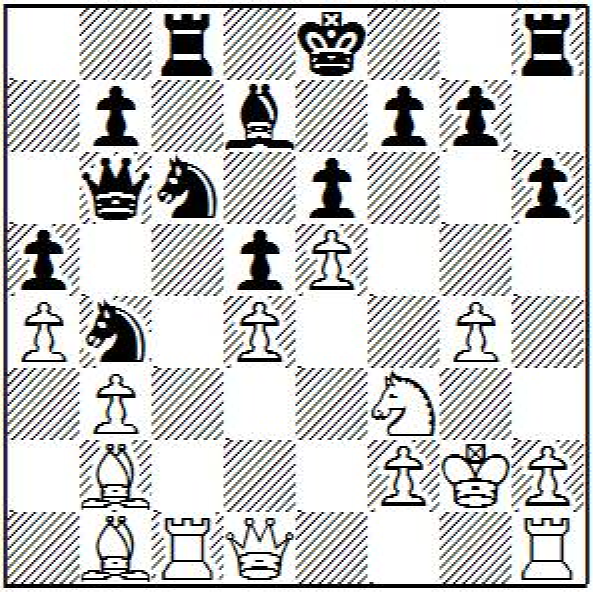
16 Kg2 Nc7 17 Be2! (retaining the ‘good’ bishop) **17 ... Bb4**

Here after 17 ... 0-0 18 Bd3 f6 White would now have had time to regroup successfully: 19 Ne2 Be8 20 exf6 Bxf6 21 Ba3 with some advantage.

18 Na2 Na6 19 Bd3 Ne7 20 Rc1 Nc6 21 Nxb4 Naxb4 22 Bb1

Over the last 10 moves White has made colossal progress: he has hidden his king at g2, overcome his lag in development and preserved his light-squared bishop from exchange. Whereas Black has played unconvincingly: he has allowed the exchange of his ‘good’ dark-squared bishop and only gained the b4-square, which in the given situation does not produce anything.

22 ... h6 23 g4



‘White opens an attack against the black king’s wing which is cramped by the e5-pawn. 23 g4 is to make castling appear unhealthy, but 23 Rc3 and Re3 was also good, perhaps even better.’ (Nimzowitsch) Or 23 Re1!? and Re3. Another idea is 23 h4!? (the position of the pawn at h5 together with Nh4 promises a favourable endgame). In any case White’s chances are somewhat better, but for the moment Black is solidly placed.

23 ... Ne7

This has to be played. Someone recommended 23 ... Ke7?! 24 Qd2 Rcf8 ‘and then ... f7-f6.’ But here I have great doubts: what to do with the king on e7?! After 25 Rc5 f6 26 Rhc1 White has an obvious advantage.

Also given was the variation 23 ... Qd8?! 24 Qd2 0-0 25 g5 hxg5 26 Nxg5, which I considered necessary to continue: 26 ... f6 (26 ... f5 27 Rg1 with an attack) 27 Nh7! Rf7 28 exf6 gxf6 29 Rhg1!, and 29 ... Rxh7? fails to 30 Kh1+ Rg7 (or 30 ... Kh8 31 Bxh7 Kxh7 32 Qe3 e5 33 Qg3) 31 Qh6 Qf8 32 Rxg7+ Qxg7 33 Rg1 and wins, while after 29 ... f5 30 Ng5 Rg7 31 Kh1 Black has a bad position.

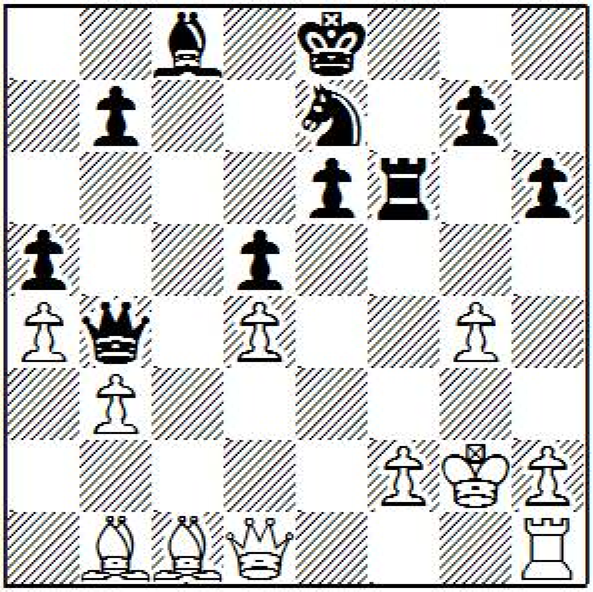
24 Rxc8+ Bxc8 25 Ne1 (25 Qd2!?) **25 ... Rf8!**

Tarrasch correctly realised that the king should be left at g8 and counterplay created by ... f7-f6.

26 Nd3 f6 27 Nxb4 Qxb4 28 exf6

A somewhat dubious idea. Nimzowitsch generally praised his own moves, but it seems to me that 28 Re1!? or perhaps 28 Qc2 came into consideration.

28 ... Rxf6 29 Bc1?!



The maker of this move attached an exclamation mark to it : ‘White gets a direct attack. Note the bishop which has been roused to activity.’ Although in the light of what follows, 29 Re1 Ng6 30 Bxg6+ Rxg6 31 h3 was more accurate.

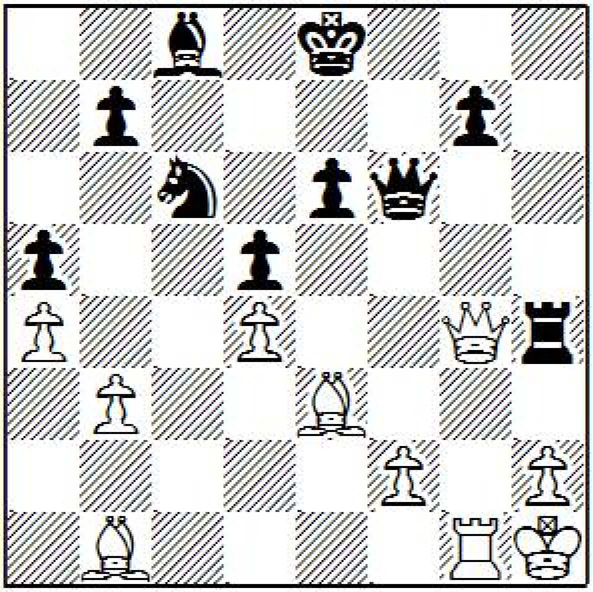
29 ... Nc6?

A serious time-trouble mistake. The commentators, who considered this to be a model instructional game, did not notice 29 ... e5! (the computer suggests this instantly). It is a pity that Tarrasch missed his chance: I should have liked to see what Nimzowitsch would have done in this case. Black is threatening ... e5-e4, shutting out the bishop at b1, 31 dxe5? Bxg4 is bad, and 30 g5 Rf7 is unclear. In a word, the plan with 29 Bc1 was dubious.

30 g5! (now White does indeed have an attack) **30 ... hxg5 31 Bxg5 Rf8 32 Be3 Qe7**

Good or bad, Black had to run with his king as soon as possible – 32 ... Kd8!? Although, of course, here too after 33 Qg4 Ne7 34 Rc1 White has the initiative and freedom for his two bishops.

33 Qg4 Qf6 34 Rg1! (a strong manoeuvre together with Kh1) **34 ... Rh8** (apparently this is also a mistake, but already in a difficult position: 34 ... Ne7 35 Kh1 Rf7 36 Qh5 Kd7 37 Bd3 etc.) **35 Kh1 Rh4?**



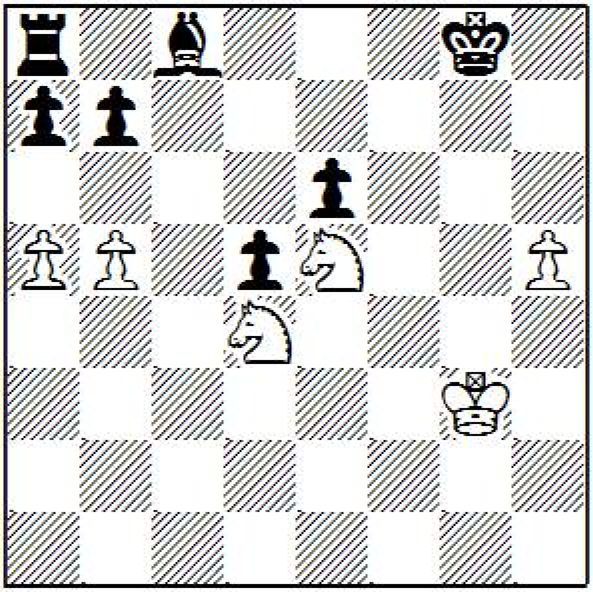
The final error. After 35 ... Kf8 36 Bd3 Bd7 White would still have had to battle for his win.

36 Qg3 (this is the end: both Bg5 and Qxg7 are threatened) **36 ... Rxd4!?** (desperation) **37 Bxd4 Nxd4 38 Qxg7 Qf3+ 39 Qg2 Qxg2+ 40 Rxg2 Nxb3 41 h4 1-0**

This game is a vivid demonstration of how new views win their place under the sun. After winning one game convincingly as Black against Paulsen, Tarrasch stagnated somewhat and rested on his laurels. Whereas Nimzowitsch upheld his new views, and it has to be said the variation with

3 e5 still remains at the centre of heated discussions: some dispute it with White, and others with Black.

In the aforementioned article Nimzowitsch expressed his most cherished, ‘truly modern’ view: yes, for creating a centre it is pawns that are the most suitable (in view of their stability), but they can well be replaced by pieces that have moved to the centre! Occupation of the centre can be replaced by piece pressure on the centre!’ Later in his main book *My System* (1929) and other theoretical works Nimzowitsch began using concepts such as the flexible centre, the security of the pawn chain, the weakness of a complex of squares of a particular colour, prophylaxis, manoeuvring, restraint and, finally, blockade.



(Nimzowitsch’s position)

This is an instructional position from Nimzowitsch’s book, which evokes the above game with Salwe (c.f. the diagram on page 277. ‘Eloquent, wouldn’t you agree? White is the exchange and a pawn down in the endgame, but his position is better thanks to the blockading knights,’ writes Tal, and he remembers another two classic examples on the theme of blockade: Reshevsky-Petrosian (Zürich candidates 1953) and Tal-Petrosian (25th USSR Championship, Riga 1958). We will return to these games in the second volume.

The ideas listed lay at the basis of Nimzowitsch's most grandiose invention – the Nimzo-Indian Defence and the Queen's Indian Defence. The system 1 d4 Nf6 and 2 ... e6 – without an early ... d7-d5, with piece pressure on the centre (or, more precisely, on the e4-square that has been weakened by d2-d4) was initially called by its author the 'Modern Queen's Gambit'. It was discovered and thoroughly analysed by Nimzowitsch in 1911-1912, tested in training games in the summer of 1913 and was soon employed for the first time in a serious competition – the All-Russian master tournament.

Game 93

B.Gregori-A.Nimzowitsch

St Petersburg 1913/14

Queen's Pawn Opening A46

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 Bg5

'Of special interest historically as being the first game in which what has been called the 'Ideal Queen's Gambit' was played, where Black forgoes altogether the occupation of the centre by his pawns. In answer to 3 c4 I had intended 3 ... b6. The point d5 is to remain permanently unoccupied.' (Nimzowitsch)

In the 1950s 3 Bg5 was a favourite weapon of Petrosian. A comparatively harmless deviation from the Queen's Indian was 3 Bf4 c5 4 c3 (Rubinstein-Nimzowitsch, St Petersburg 1914).

3 ... h6

3 ... c5 4 e3 b6? is inaccurate because of 5 d5! (Petrosian's discovery). We will examine 3 ... d5 (Spassky-Petrosian, Moscow 7th matchgame 1966) in the second volume.

4 Bxf6

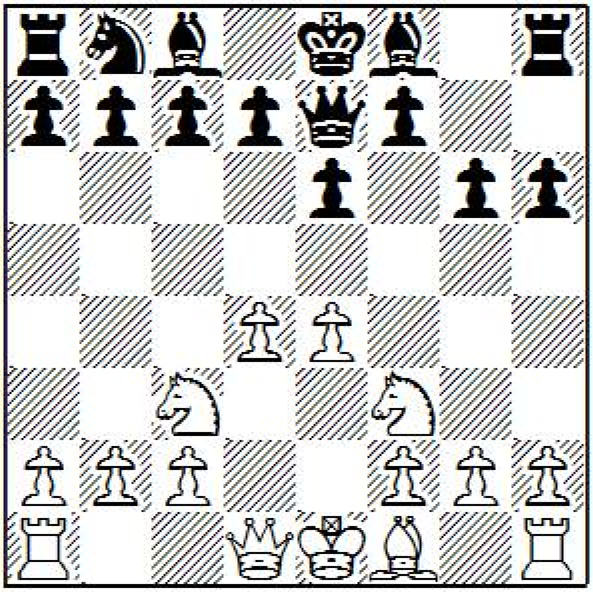
After 4 Bh4 Alekhine, who borrowed this system from Nimzowitsch, suggested 4 ... d5, but he himself played 4 ... b6 5 e3 Bb7 6 Bd3 c5 7 0-0 Be7 8 Nbd2 d6 9 Qe2 Nbd7 10 Rad1 0-0 11 c3 Qc7 12 Rfe1 Rfe8 with a slightly inferior position for Black (Janowski-Alekhine, Mannheim 1914). More energetic is 4 ... c5! 5 e3 cxd4 6 exd4 Be7 7 Bd3 0-0 8 c3 b6 9 Qe2

Bb7 10 Nbd2 Nc6 11 Bxf6!? (11 0-0 Nd5 equalises) 11 ... Bxf6 12 0-0-0 g6! 13 h4 Bg7 14 Kb1 Ne7! etc. (I. Sokolov-Karpov, Linares 1995).

4 ... Qxf6 5 e4 g6!?

5 ... d6 6 Nc3 (or 6 c3 g6) 6 ... Nd7 is now in vogue, whereas Karpov has tried the sharp 6 ... g5!? a couple of times.

6 Nc3 (the alternative is 6 Bd3, Nbd2 and c2-c3) **6 ... Qe7!** (avoiding the opening of the position after e4-e5)



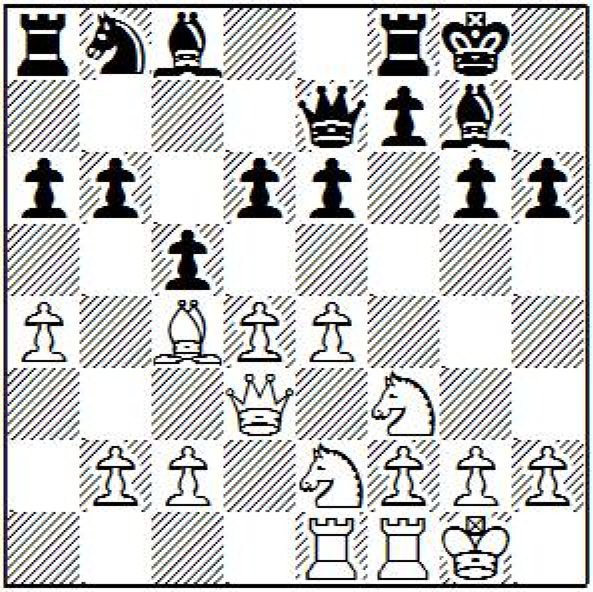
7 Bc4

Or 7 Bd3 d6 8 Qe2 Bg7 9 e5 d5 with equal chances (Tselikov-Alekhine, Moscow 1915). 7 Qd2 d6 8 0-0-0 is more lively, for example: 8 ... a6 9 h4 Bg7 10 g3 b5 with sharp play (Korchnoi-Karpov, Moscow 19th matchgame 1974).

7 ... Bg7 8 0-0 d6 9 Qd3 0-0 10 Rae1 a6 11 a4 b6 12 Ne2 (12 e5 d5!; 12 d5 e5!) **12 ... c5!**

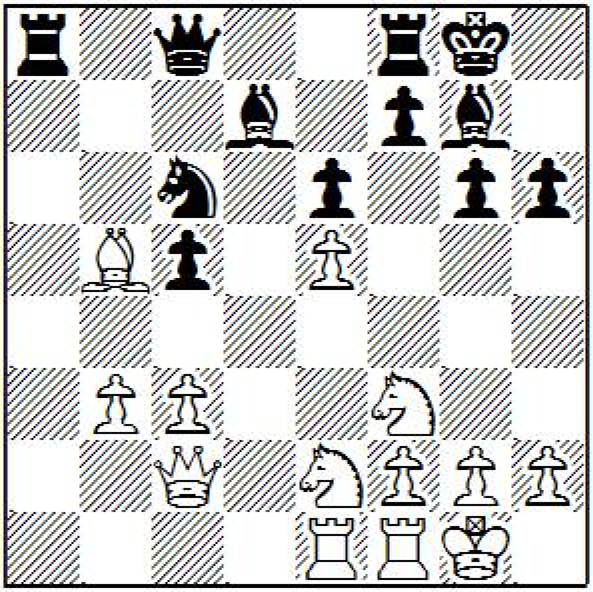
‘A strategical device which the hypermodernist may care to note, makes its appearance here. I mean the continuity of an attack directed against a pawn mass. This is to be understood thus: the threatened advance must first have its sting drawn (in this game this was done by 6 ... Qe7). It is only when this has happened that we may regard the mass as semi-mobile, and attack it; for only those objects which have been made immobile should be chosen as a target.’ (Nimzowitsch)

Note that both this game, and the aforementioned Janowski-Alekhine game, are, with reversed colours, unusual prototypes of the Réti Opening!



13 c3 Bd7 14 b3 (14 Nd2!? Bxa4 15 f4 Nimzowitsch) **14 ... Qe8 15 Qc2 b5 16 axb5 axb5 17 Bd3 Qc8! 18 dxc5 dxc5 19 e5 Nc6 20 Bxb5?!**

After 20 Ng3 b4 Black’s two bishops would sooner or later have had their say.



20 ... Nxe5 21 Nxe5 Bxb5 22 Nf3 Qb7 23 Nd2 Bc6 24 f3 Rfb8 25 Ng3 Qa7 26 Rf2 Bd5 27 Kf1 Qa2 28 Qxa2 Rxa2 29 c4 Bd4 30 Rfe2 Bc6 31 Rd1 Rb2 32 Rc1 h5 33 Ke1 Ra8 and Black won.

In the following famous game the opening was played rather weakly, which, however, is quite excusable: it was one of the first experiences of the Queen's Indian Defence being employed.

Game 94

F.Sämisch-A.Nimzowitsch

Copenhagen 1923

Queen's Indian Defence E06

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 b6!?

A challenge to the established rules: in the traditions of the classical school was if not 1 ... d5, then at least 3 ... d5.

4 g3

The Rubinstein Variation. The game Bernstein-Nimzowitsch (St Petersburg 1914) went 4 Nc3 Bb7 5 e3 Bb4 6 Qb3 Qe7 (6 ... c5 or 6 ... a5 is better) 7 a3 Bxc3+ 8 Qxc3 d6 9 b4 Nbd7 10 Bb2 a5 (Nimzowitsch recommended 10 ... Ne4! and ... f7-f5) 11 Be2 axb4 12 axb4 Rxa1+ 13 Bxa1 0-0 14 0-0 Ne4 15 Qc2 f5 16 Nd2 Nxd2 (16 ... c5!?) 17 Qxd2 Ra8 with a fighting draw on the 50th move.

This game became a prototype of a fashionable position from the ‘Classical Variation’ of the Nimzo-Indian Defence: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 Qc2 0-0 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 Qxc3 b6 7 Nf3 Bb7 8 e3 d6 9 b4 Nbd7 10 Bb2, and here apart from 10 ... Qe7 11 Be2! (11 Bd3 c5! Kasparov-Gligoric, Lucerne Olympiad 1982) 11 ... Ne4 12 Qc2 f5 13 0-0 Ndf6 14 Rad1 Rae8 15 Nd2 Nxd2 16 Qxd2 Ne4 17 Qc1! with advantage to White (Miles-Andersson, Wijk aan Zee 1981), 10 ... c5, 10 ... a5 or the immediate 10 ... Ne4 (Kramnik-Karpov, Dos Hermanas 1997) are possible, although everywhere, thanks to his two bishops, White retains a strategic initiative.

4 ... Bb7

The variation with 4 ... Ba6!? also comes from Nimzowitsch and was, incidentally, the main theoretical trend at the end of the 20th century!

5 Bg2 Be7 6 Nc3 (or 6 0-0 0-0 7 Nc3) **6 ... 0-0**

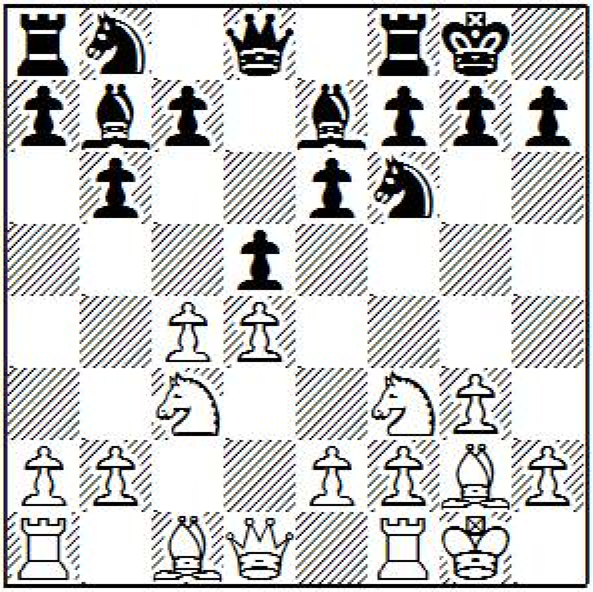
The main move is 6 ... Ne4! In Euwe-Alekhine (Holland 21st matchgame 1937) Black tried this even with the loss of a tempo: 5 ... Bb4+ 6 Bd2 Be7 7 Nc3 Ne4 8 0-0 0-0 9 d5 Nxd2 10 Qxd2 Bf6 11 Rad1 d6 etc.

7 0-0

7 Qc2! is more energetic, as in the games Ravinsky-Botvinnik (Leningrad 1930), Korchnoi-Karpov (Moscow 5th matchgame 1974) and Karpov-Spassky (Riga 1975).

7 ... d5

Nevertheless Nimzowitsch is still drawn towards the Queen’s Gambit ... The first to categorically declare that only 7 ... Ne4! is in the spirit of the position was Botvinnik – and he successfully defended his thesis against none other than Alekhine (AVRO Tournament, Holland 1938).



8 Ne5

As is shown by modern praxis, beginning with the match game Korchnoi-Spassky (Belgrade 17th matchgame 1977/78), 8 cxd5 exd5 9 Qc2 Na6 10 Rd1 is also good for White.

8 ... c6?!

The fashion at the end of the 20th century was for 8 ... Na6. Now the position on the board is a favourable variation for White of the Catalan Opening.

9 cxd5?!

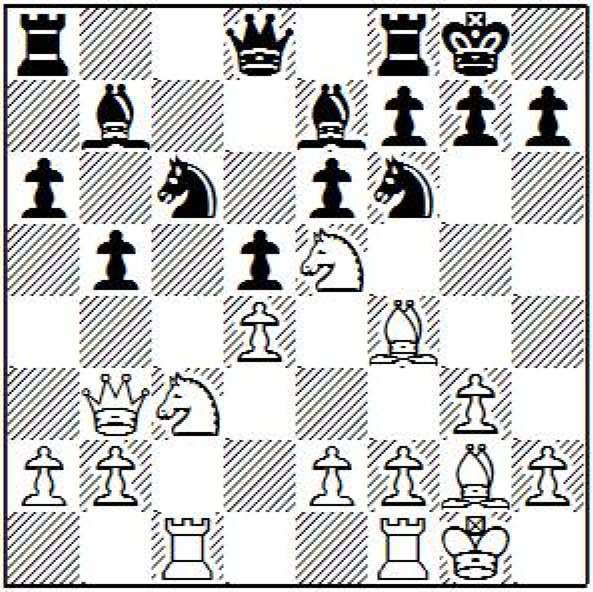
9 e4! is much stronger, for example: 9 ... dxc4 10 Nxc4 Ba6 11 b3 b5 12 Ne3 b4 13 Ne2 Bxe2 (13 ... Nbd7 14 Bb2) 14 Qxe2 Qxd4 15 Bb2 with excellent play for the pawn (Smyslov-Guimard, Groningen 1946), or 9 ... Nbd7 10 Nxc6!? (10 exd5 cxd5 11 cxd5 Nxe5 12 d6 Nc6! is unclear) 10 ... Bxc6 11 exd5 exd5 (11 ... Bb7?! 12 d6) 12 cxd5 Bb7 13 d6 Bxg2 14 dxe7 Qxe7 15 Kxg2, by contrast, with an extra pawn.

9 ... cxd5 10 Bf4 (10 Bg5 Nbd7 11 Re1 Nxe5 12 dxe5 Nd7 is level) **10 ... a6** (with the idea of ... b6-b5 and ... Nc6-a5-c4) **11 Rc1 b5 12 Qb3**

12 a3!? is interesting – 12 ... Nc6? 13 Nxd5!, while if 12 ... Nbd7, then 13 Nd3 with complicated, unclear play: 13 ... Qb6 14 e3 Rfc8 15 b4 Rc4 16 Nc5 a5 17 Qb3 etc.

12 ... Nc6?!

‘The ghost! With noiseless steps he presses on towards c4.’ (Nimzowitsch) But, 12 ... Nbd7!? 13 Na4 Rc8 14 Nd3 Ne4 15 f3 Bc6 was evidently more solid.. Here one of the basic problems of Nimzowitsch the player is revealed: carried away by his strategic ideas, he often ignored tactics!



13 Nxc6?!

For some reason the strong tactical blow 13 Nxd5!, opening the position to White’s advantage, went unnoticed: 13 ... Nxd4 14 Nxe7+ Qxe7 15 Qe3 Bxg2 16 Kxg2 Qb7+ 17 f3 Nf5 (17 ... Rfd8?! 18 Rfd1 Nf5 19 Qf2 Nd5 20 Bd2 f6 21 Nd3) 18 Qf2 Nh5 (or 18 ... Nd5 19 Bd2) 19 Bd2 Qd5 20 Bc3 b4 21 e4 Qb5 22 a4!? Qxa4 23 Bd2 Ne7 24 Qc5, and Black does not have clear equality. I don’t know, but perhaps this was too complicated for those times?

13 ... Bxc6

‘Sämisch sacrifices two tempi (exchange of the tempo-eating knight at e5 for the knight which is almost undeveloped) merely to be rid of the ghost.’ (Nimzowitsch)

14 h3?! Qd7 15 Kh2?! (Sämisch does not seem to know what to do, and he marks time) **15 ... Nh5!**

‘I could have supplied him with yet a second ghost by 15 ... Qb7 and ... Nd7-b6-c4, but I wished to turn my attention to the kingside.’

(Nimzowitsch)

16 Bd2 f5 (White’s position is already worse) **17 Qd1?**

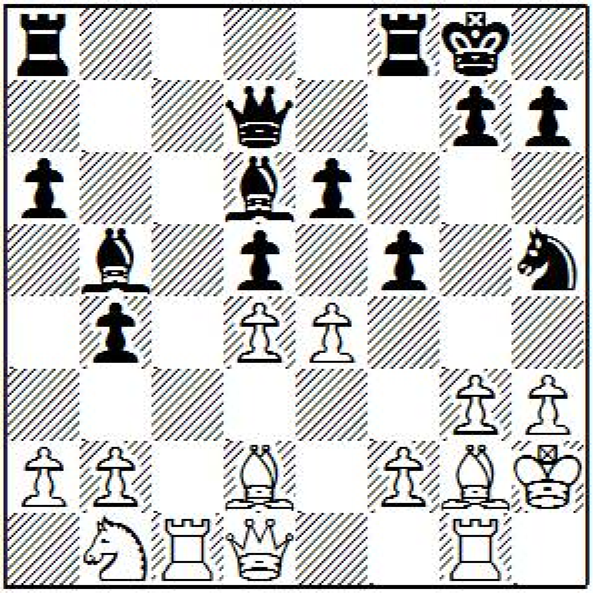
Although White has lost a lot of time, after 17 Nb1 he could still have put up a fight, for example: 17 ... a5 (17 ... Nf6 18 Bb4) 18 Rc2 f4 19 g4 Bd6 20 Bf3 Nf6 21 Rfc1 Rfc8.

17 ... b4 18 Nb1 Bb5 19 Rg1

Or 19 Qe1 a5 20 a3 Rab8. ‘One senses how White is shrivelling.’ (Nimzowitsch)

19 ... Bd6 20 e4?!

A desperate chance, the only one to try and escape from the vice.



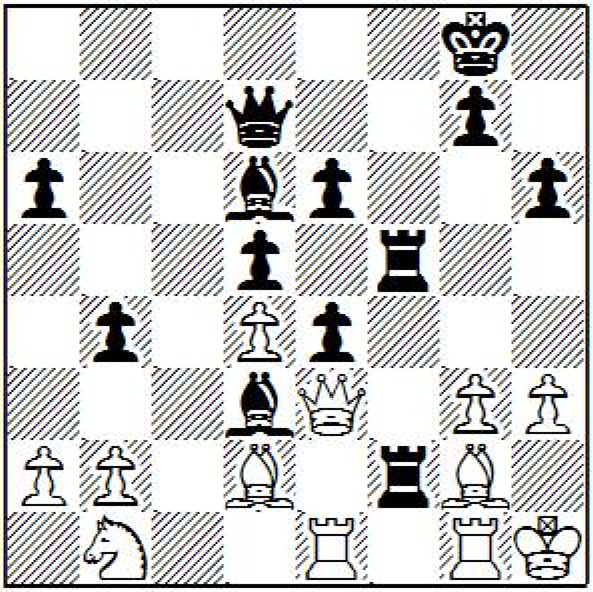
20 ... fxe4!

An absolutely correct piece sacrifice, leading to the complete paralysis of White’s army. ‘He is unable to disentangle his pieces.’ (Nimzowitsch)

21 Qxh5 Rxf2 22 Qg5 (22 a3 a5) **22 ... Raf8 23 Kh1 R8f5 24 Qe3 Bd3**

Black is playing for zugzwang, but it is amusing (and also not pointed out by anyone) that it was also possible simply to win the queen: 24 ... Re2! 25 Qb3 Ba4 26 Rc8+ Rf8.

25 Rce1 h6! 0-1



Brilliant! White resigns – he has no moves: if 26 Kh2 or 26 g4, then 26 ... R5f3!

‘This game,’ wrote Nimzowitsch, ‘called in Denmark the “immortal zugzwang game”, is just as typical of our time as was the “immortal sacrificial game” of Anderssen’s time. Now we sacrifice for the sake of prophylaxis, or to set up a blockade, or to restrict the dynamic potential of the opponent’s forces, but not for the sake of performing a crude act of aggression. The crude is obsolete!’

In the same vein is the following fine win by Black, illustrating no less vividly Nimzowitsch’s favourite ideas of blockade and the general restriction of mobility.

Game 95

P.Johner-A.Nimzowitsch

Dresden 1926

Nimzo-Indian Defence E50

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4

At that time this flexible defence was not taken seriously, whereas nowadays it is one of the most popular openings for Black.

4 e3 0-0

The historic source game Janowski-Nimzowitsch (St Petersburg 1914) went 4 ... b6 5 Bd3 Bb7 6 Nf3 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 d6 (Nimzowitsch himself suggested 7 ... c5! and ... Nc6) 8 Qc2 Nbd7 9 e4 e5 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bg5 h6 12 Bd2 Re8 with a lengthy battle 'for' and 'against' d4-d5.

Then Nimzowitsch came to the conclusion that in this set-up the light-squared bishop should be kept on the c8-g4 diagonal. For many years his remarkable system, sometimes called the 'wall', was performed via 4 ... c5 5 Bd3 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bxc3+! 7 bxc3 d6 8 e4 (8 Nd2 e5 – cf. the note to 9 ... b6) 8 ... e5, for example:

1) 9 d5 Ne7 (9 ... Na5 has been rejected because of Nd2-f1-e3: the c4-pawn is securely defended and the knight at a5 is isolated) 10 Nh4 h6! 11 f4 Ng6! 12 Nxg6 fxg6 13 fxe5?! (13 0-0 0-0 14 f5 or 14 Qe1 is better) 13 ... dxe5 14 Be3 b6 15 0-0 0-0 (here the game is level) 16 a4?! a5! 17 Rb1 Bd7 18 Rb2 Rb8 19 Rbf2?! Qe7 20 Bc2 g5! 21 Bd2 Qe8! 22 Be1 Qg6 23 Qd3 Nh5! etc. (Spassky-Fischer, Reykjavik 5th matchgame 1972), while if 11 g3, then 11 ... g5! (this is also strong after 11 0-0 or 11 f3) 12 Ng2 (12 Qf3 Nfg8) 12 ... Bh3 followed by ... Qd7 and ... 0-0-0;

2) 9 h3 h6 10 Be3 b6 11 d5 Ne7 12 Nd2 g5!? (12 ... Nh7!? Timman) 13 Nf1 (or 13 h4 gxh4! 14 Rxh4 Ng6 Yusupov-Karpov, Dortmund 1994) 13 ... Ng6 14 g3 Bd7 15 Bd2 Qe7! 16 Ne3 0-0-0 with sharp play (Yusupov-Lalic, Yerevan Olympiad 1996).

As we see, with this move order Black has an important additional resource – queenside castling (or even a walk by the king to the queenside). Therefore since the time of the match games Korchnoi-Karpov (Baguio 3rd and 5th matchgames 1978) White has increasingly often answered 4 ... c5 with Rubinstein's 5 Ne2! Today this is considered the strongest move, and Black has considerable problems in equalising. A fresh example is Kramnik-Leko (Budapest rapidplay, 9th matchgame 2001).

5 Bd3 (here too Rubinstein used to play 5 Ne2, avoiding the doubling of his pawns) **5 ... c5 6 Nf3 Nc6**

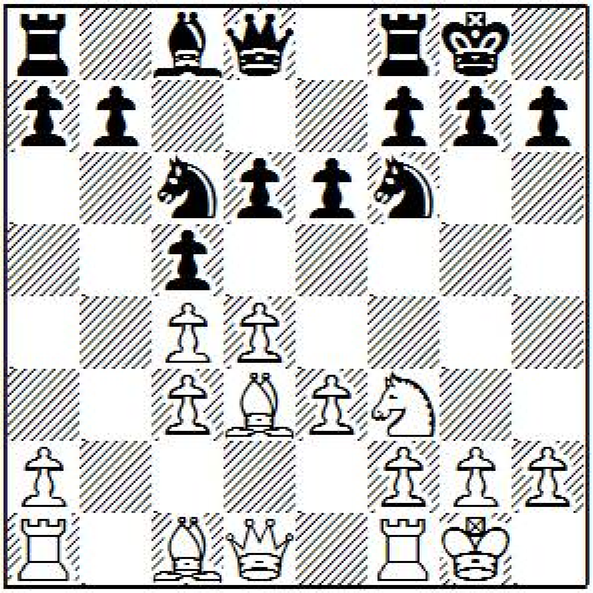
For some time 6 ... d5! has been preferred, transposing into the 'Modern Variation'.

7 0-0 Bxc3

The standard 7 ... d5! 8 a3 Bxc3 9 bxc3 dxc4 10 Bxc4 Qc7 or 9 ... Qc7 leads to a *tabiya* of the 1950s-70s, which is topical even today: Spassky used to play this, and Kramnik also plays it.

8 bxc3 d6

This is also a theoretical *tabiya*, even with the inclusion of castling.



9 Nd2

‘A fine idea!’ (Nimzowitsch) The alternative is 9 e4 e5 10 d5 Ne7 11 Nh4, for example: 11 ... Ng6 12 Nf5 (12 Nxg6 fxg6! – Rubinstein!) 12 ... Re8 13 Rb1 h6!? 14 Qf3 Rb8 15 g3 Nh7 16 h4 Ne7! (Yusupov-Epishin, Dortmund 1994), or 11 ... h6 12 f3 (12 g3!? g5 13 Ng2; 12 Qf3!? Ng6 13 Nf5 Hort) 12 ... g5 13 Nf5 Nxf5 14 exf5 Bd7 with complicated play (Gelfand-Short, Dos Hermanas 1997).

9 ... b6

With the original idea of 10 ... e5 11 d5 Na5 12 Nb3 Nb7!? After the immediate 9 ... e5! (the main move) Nimzowitsch did not like 10 d5 Ne7 (10 ... Na5?! 11 Nb3!) 11 e4 with similar play to his aforementioned game with Janowski. However, experience has shown that after 11 ... Ng6 12 g3 Bh3 13 Re1 Ne8 14 Rb1 Qd7 (and ... f7-f5) or 11 ... h6 12 Re1 Nh7 13 Nf1 f5 Black is alright.

Therefore after 9 ... e5 White more often tries 10 Rb1!? or knight moves:

1) 10 Nb3 – now 10 ... b6 leads to a position from the game, but Black also has 10 ... Qe7!? (Portisch-Seirawan, Toluca interzonal 1982) and 10 ... e4!? (Andersson's move) 11 Be2 b6 12 Bd2 Ne7! 13 Kh1 Nf5 14 Be1 Qe7 with a comfortable game (Portisch-Miles, Niksic 1983);

2) 10 Ne4 b6 (10 ... Bf5 has also been played) 11 Qf3 (11 Nxf6+ Qxf6 12 Be4 Bb7 13 Bd5 Na5 equalises; 11 f4!?) 11 ... Bb7 12 Ng3?! (12 Nxf6+ Qxf6 13 Qxf6 gxf6 14 f4! is better) 12 ... Kh8! 13 d5?! (13 Qd1) 13 ... e4! 14 Bxe4 Ne5 15 Qf4 Ba6 16 Rd1? g5! 17 Qxg5 (17 Qf5 Bc8) 17 ... Rg8 18 Qh6 (18 Qf4 Rg4 etc.) 18 ... Rxg3 19 hxg3 Nxe4 and wins (Kamsky-Anand, Sanghi Nagar 2nd matchgame 1994).

10 Nb3?!

Of course, 10 f4! is stronger. Nimzowitsch gives the variation 10 ... e5 11 fxe5 dxe5 12 d5 Na5 13 Nb3 Nb7 14 e4 Ne8 and ... Ned6 when 'the game would stand about even', but White is not obliged to take on e5, freeing the d6-square for his opponent. However, here it is not a matter of variations, but of the fact that the master was thinking in positional categories that were unknown to the majority of his contemporaries.

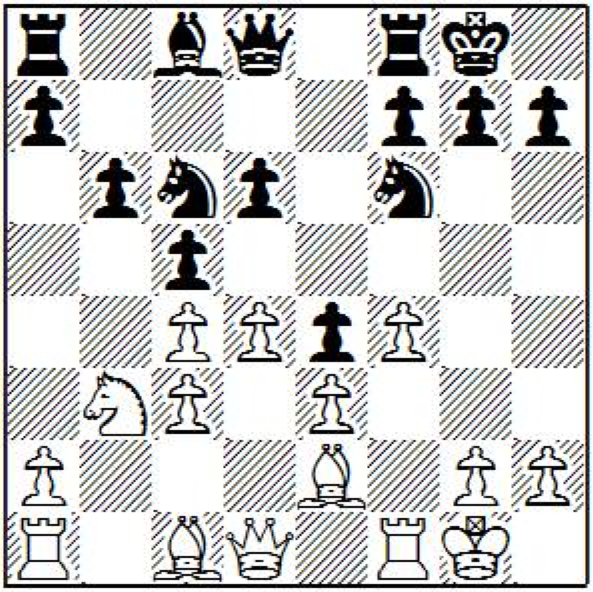
10 ... e5! 11 f4 e4!?

'This move would also have been the reply to 11 d5, for example 11 ... e4 12 Be2 (12 dxc6 exd3 with advantage to Black) 12 ... Ne5 with centralisation.' (Nimzowitsch) In 1972 Portisch tried 11 Bd2 (the solid 11 f3 has also been played) 11 ... Ne7?! 12 e4 Ng6 13 f4!, but 11 ... Qe7! is better.

'11 ... Qe7 was also possible, for if say 12 fxe5 dxe5 13 d5, then 13 ... Nd8 (13 ... e4! is better) 14 e4 Ne8, and Black by ... Nd6 and ... f7-f6 gets a strong defensive position.' (Nimzowitsch) But nowadays the problems are solved by 11 ... exd4!? 12 cxd4 cxd4 13 e4 (or 13 exd4 d5!) 13 ... Re8 14 Qf3 Bb7 15 Ba3 Qd7 16 Rae1 a5 with sufficient counterplay (Pinter-Razuvaev, Budapest 1982).

12 Be2

The time has come for revelations.



12 ... Qd7!?

The author of this surprising move attaches two exclamation marks to it (in the Russian edition): ‘Black sees in White’s kingside pawns (f-, g- and h-pawns) a qualitative majority. The text move involves a complicated system of restraint. A simpler one could have been brought about by 12 ... Ne8, but after 13 g4 (or 13 f5 Qg5) 13 ... f5 14 d5 (if 14 dxc5 dxc5 15 Qd5+ Qxd5 16 cxd5 Ne7 17 Rd1 Nd6 Black has rather the better game) 14 ... Ne7 15 g5 this would again lead to a deadlock; we miss the squares at c5 and f5 for the knights. To conduct restrictive operations, while avoiding the deadlock, makes the problem exceedingly difficult to solve.’ (Nimzowitsch)

It is amusing that 20th century theory altogether ignored 12 ... Qd7!? and considered only 12 ... Ne8 13 Bd2!? f5 14 Be1, then h2-h3, g2-g4 and if possible Bh4 with some initiative for White.

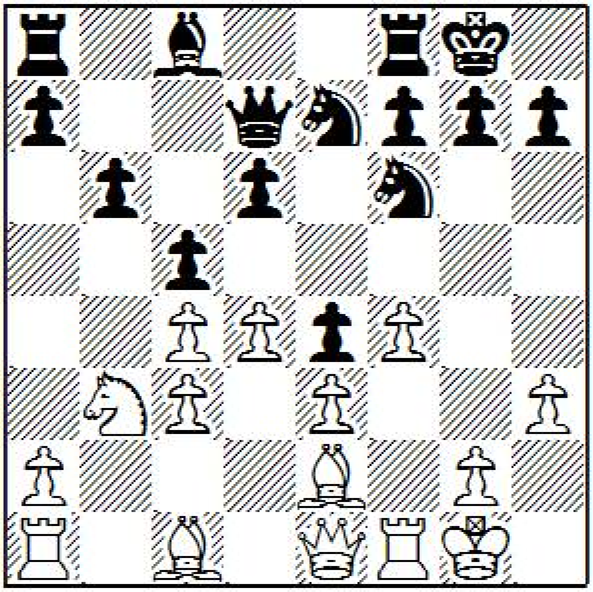
13 h3

Later Larsen suggested 13 a4!? (13 Bd2 Ne7 14 Be1 Ba6!, and if 15 Bh4? Nf5 16 Bf2 cxd4! 17 cxd4 d5 with pressure) 13 ... a5 14 Bd2 Ne7 15 Be1 – after 15 ... Ba6! 16 Nd2 d5 17 Bf2 Rfc8 Black has some initiative, but White’s position is fairly solid and there is nothing terrible for him as yet. Also interesting is Szabo’s recommendation 13 f5!? Ne7 14 g4 h5 15 h3 hxg4 16 hxg4 with counterplay on the kingside. However, for the moment Johner has no understanding of what is going on ...

13 ... Ne7 14 Qe1?

But this is an obvious mistake: the queen manoeuvre does not at all go together with the previous move. Once White had played 13 h3, he should have continued 14 g4!? or at least 14 Kh2!? (Szabo).

There was also 14 Bd2, after which Nimzowitsch recommended 14 ... Nf5 15 Qe1 g6 16 g4 Ng7 17 Qh4 Nfe8 18 a4 (otherwise ... Qa4) 18 ... f5 19 g5 Nc7 20 d5 Ba6! (20 ... a5!?) 21 Kf2 (21 a5 b5) 21 ... Qf7! 22 Rfd1 (22 Qh6? Nxd5! 23 cxd5 Bxe2 24 Kxe2 Qxd5 25 Nc1 Nh5!, cutting off the queen) 22 ... Kh8, then 23 ... Nh5, ... Rg8, ... Kg7-f8-e7-d7 and ... h7-h6!, and Larsen – 14 ... h5!? 15 Bxh5 (15 Be1 Nf5 16 Bf2 g6) 15 ... Nxh5 16 Qxh5 Qa4! (16 ... Ba6 17 f5!) 17 f5 f6 with an excellent game for Black (18 Rf4? Bxf5).



14 ... h5!

The start of a pawn-piece squeeze. Now White is tied down and has no active possibilities.

15 Bd2 (but not 15 Qh4? Nf5 16 Qg5 Nh7 17 Qxh5 Ng3) **15 ... Qf5!**

An amazing conception! ‘The queen is bound for ... h7! where she will be excellently placed, for then the crippling of White’s kingside by ... h5-h4 will at once be threatened.’ (Nimzowitsch)

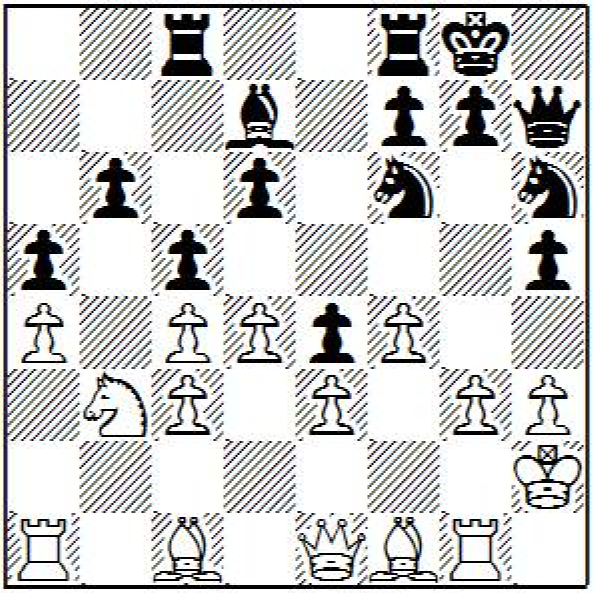
16 Kh2 Qh7! 17 a4 Nf5 (with the threat of 18 ... Ng4+ 19 hxg4? hxg4+ 20 Kg1 g3 winning) **18 g3**

Larsen suggests 18 a5!, and he is right: 18 ... Ng4+ 19 Bxg4! hxg4 20 axb6 gxh3 21 gxh3 Nh4 22 Qg3 with unclear complications. And although 18 ... Bd7 is possible with some advantage, even so White’s position is better than in the game.

18 ... a5

Depriving the opponent of his last counterplay. The weakness at b6 is balanced by the weakness at a4 (as also in the aforementioned Spassky-Fischer game!).

19 Rg1 Nh6 20 Bf1 Bd7 21 Bc1 Rac8



Threatening by ... Be6 and ... cxd4! to force d4-d5, ‘in order then to operated undisturbed on the kingside.’ (Nimzowitsch) It is a real pleasure to watch how Black converts his advantage!

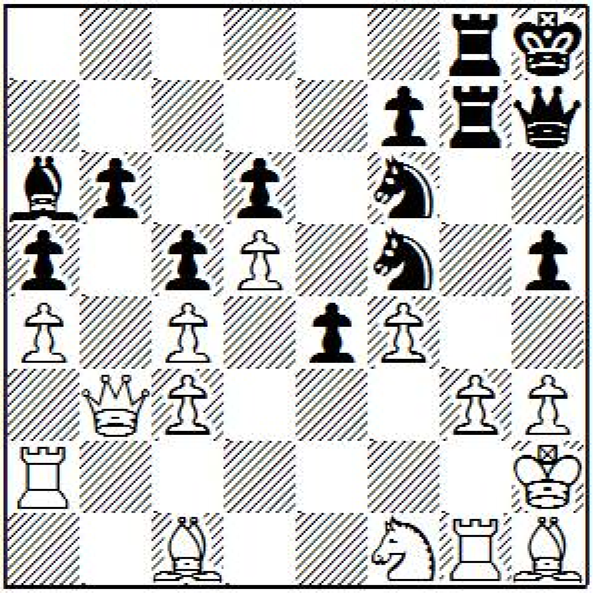
22 d5 Kh8 23 Nd2 (or 23 Kg2 Rg8 24 Kf2 g5!) **23 ... Rg8**

The start of the decisive attack, the logical precondition for which was restricting the mobility of the white pawns.

24 Bg2 g5 25 Nf1 Rg7 26 Ra2 Nf5 27 Bh1 Rcg8 28 Qd1 gxf4!

‘Opens the g-file for himself, but the e-file for his opponent. This move, therefore, demanded deep deliberation.’ (Nimzowitsch)

29 exf4 Bc8 30 Qb3 Ba6



31 Re2

If 31 Bd2 Black would have won by the pretty 31 ... Rg6! 32 Be1 Ng4+ 33 hxg4 hxg4+ 34 Kg2 Bxc4! 35 Qxc4 e3!! – a quiet move with unavoidable mate or the win of the queen. But now too the finish is no less fine:

31 ... Nh4! 32 Re3

‘Here I naturally expected 32 Nd2. But a result of that move would have been a delightful queen sacrifice, namely: 32 ... Bc8! (but not 32 ... Qf5? 33 Qd1! Bc8 34 Qf1) 33 Nxe4 (33 Qd1 Bxh3! 34 Kxh3 Qf5+) 33 ... Qf5! 34 Nf2 Qxh3+! 35 Nxh3 Ng4 mate.’ (Nimzowitsch)

32 ... Bc8 33 Qc2 Bxh3! 34 Bxe4 (or 34 Kxh3 Qf5+ 35 Kh2 Ng4+ 36 Kh3 Nf2+ 37 Kh2 Qh3 mate) **34 ... Bf5**

Accuracy to the end: there is no defence against ... h5-h4.

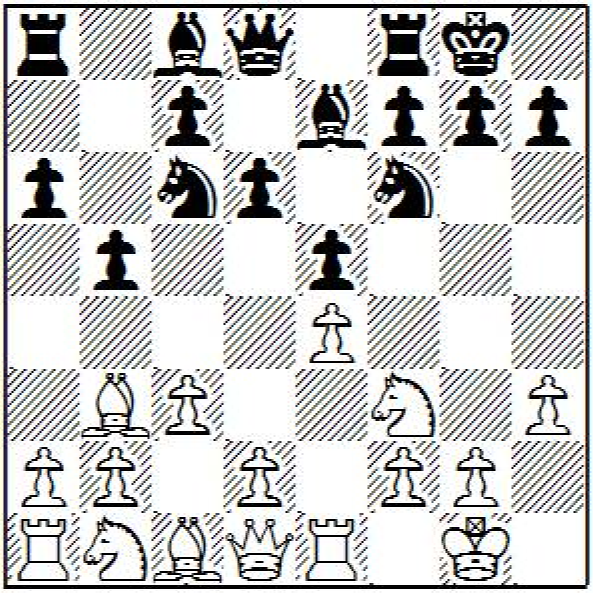
35 Bxf5 Nxf5 36 Re2 h4 37 Rgg2 hxg3+ 38 Kg1 Qh3 39 Ne3 Nh4 40 Kf1 Re8! 0-1

With the threat of 41 ... Nxg2 42 Rxg2 Qh1+ 43 Ke2 Qxg2+! And if 41 Ke1, then 41 ... Nf3+ 42 Kd1 Qh1+ and mate.

As I have already mentioned, Nimzowitsch considered Chigorin to be his teacher. It was from him that he adopted the ‘incorrect’ (by the standards of the time) system with the moves ... Nf6, ... d7-d6, ... Nbd7, ... e7-e5 and ... Be7, or even ... g7-g6 and ... Bg7, thus becoming one of the founders of the King’s Indian Defence, although **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 0-0 6 Nf3 Nbd7** had already occurred in the games Schwarz-L. Paulsen (Leipzig match 1879) and Englisch-Tarrasch (Hamburg 1885). Then Tartakower and Réti played this way, but this opening only reached its heyday in the mid-20th century – by the efforts of Konstantinopolsky, Boleslavsky, Bronstein and Geller (as detailed in the second Volume).

The young Nimzowitsch so liked the Indian set-up, that he also employed it in the Philidor Defence – for example, against Teichmann (San Sebastian 1911): **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 Nf6! 4 Nc3 Nbd7** (the Hanham Variation; later Nimzowitsch switched to 4 ... exd4) **5 Bc4 Be7 6 0-0 0-0 7 Qe2 c6 8 Bg5?!** (8 a4!) **8 ... h6 9 Bh4 Nh5 10 Bg3 Nxg3 11 hxg3 b5 12 Bd3 a6! 13 a4 Bb7 14 Rad1 Qc7** with an excellent game for Black.

Was it not this set-up that produced the remarkable idea of another hypermodernist, the Hungarian master Gyula Breyer (1893-1921)? In a key position of the Ruy Lopez after **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3** instead of the usual 9 ... Na5 10 Bc2 c5 he suggested a paradoxical manoeuvre.



9 ... Nb8!? 10 d4 Nbd7, for example: 11 Nbd2 Bb7 12 Bc2 Re8 13 Nf1 Bf8 14 Ng3 g6 15 b3 c6 16 Bg5 h6 17 Be3 Bg7 18 Qd2 Kh7 19 Nh2 Qc7 with a flexible position ‘*à la* Nimzowitsch’.

At the end of the 20th century the Breyer Variation (and the variation of Igor Zaitsev which grew out of it: 9 ... Bb7 10 d4 Re8 with the idea of ... Bf8 and only then ... Nb8-d7) gained considerable popularity, as we will see from a game analysed in the second volume, R. Byrne-Spassky (San Juan 3rd matchgame 1974).

With his ability to think in deep and original schemes, Nimzowitsch (like Rubinstein too) was far ahead of his time. His plans were deadly against weaker opponents, but ... they did not work against the world champions. Nimzowitsch had a pitiful individual score against Capablanca and Alekhine: he simply could not withstand the overwhelming mental power of these great players, who intuitively understood all his positional revelations.

I think that Capablanca did not even think about formulations, but he knew everything about blockade, about weak points, and about manoeuvring, sensing a position with the tips of his fingers. Whereas with Alekhine things often did not get as far as manoeuvring: while Nimzowitsch was preparing to exploit weak points, he was being mated! And although the ‘great Aron’ did well in tournaments from 1925-31, was in the world’s top five, and issued challenges to both Capablanca and Alekhine, sincerely considering himself to be a contender for the throne, he was never genuinely close to the title of world champion.

Nevertheless, Nimzowitsch’s contribution to the theory of positional play was enormous. His book *My System* became an invaluable manual for many generations of players (Petrosian grew up on it!). His disputes with Tarrasch expanded the boundaries of our understanding of chess. Tarrasch, as a classic of the post-Steinitz era, opposed with all his heart and soul the ‘crooked’ ideas of the hypermodernists, who in fact were merely developing the teachings of Steinitz (as Lasker wrote, ‘the new school should unite and synthesise that which the two great antagonists, Steinitz and Chigorin, embodied’). I think that the historic dispute of the two titans of chess thinking ended in favour of Nimzowitsch: the popularity of his defence far exceeded the popularity of the Tarrasch – a victory for flexibility!

The Réti Phenomenon

Whereas Nimzowitsch was the pioneer of hypermodernism, and Saviely Tartakower (1887-1956) with his *Die hypermoderne Schachpartie* was its witty populariser, the outstanding Czech grandmaster Richard Réti (1889-1929) staggered everyone in the early 1920s with his spectacular wins at high level, gained with a highly unusual method.

Game 96

R.Réti-A.Rubinstein

Carlsbad 1923

Réti Opening A07

1 Nf3 d5 2 g3

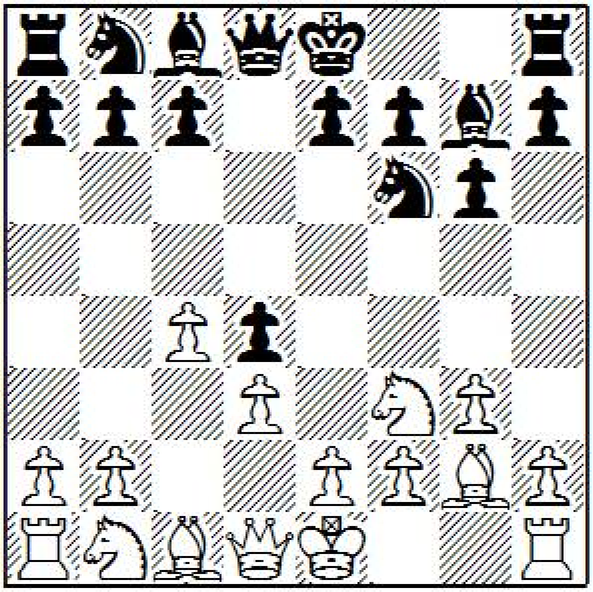
Or 2 c4 c6 3 b3 Bf5 4 g3 (*Game No.71*); this set-up was also adopted by both Capablanca (*Game No.108*) and Alekhine (*Game No.146*). I should remind you that Morphy and Steinitz avoided the fianchetto and in the 19th century it was employed only by Staunton, Paulsen (both mainly as Black) and Chigorin, but after 1 e4.

2 ... Nf6 3 Bg2 g6 4 c4

In contrast to Nimzowitsch, who played 1 Nf3, 2 b3 and 3 Bb2 and put pressure on the e5-square, Réti puts pressure on d5. As he wrote, what is common for the hypermodernists ‘is only the fact that they are all seekers, aiming to discover new (apart from those established by Steinitz) strategic laws; but they proceed towards this goal in the most varied ways.’

Yes, those were glorious times, when playing chess, which was still full of unresolved mysteries, became a battle of philosophical conceptions ... In the given instance it was Réti who was proved historically correct: the pressure on d5 is after all more effective than that on e5.

4 ... d4 (4 ... c6 is sounder) **5 d3 Bg7**



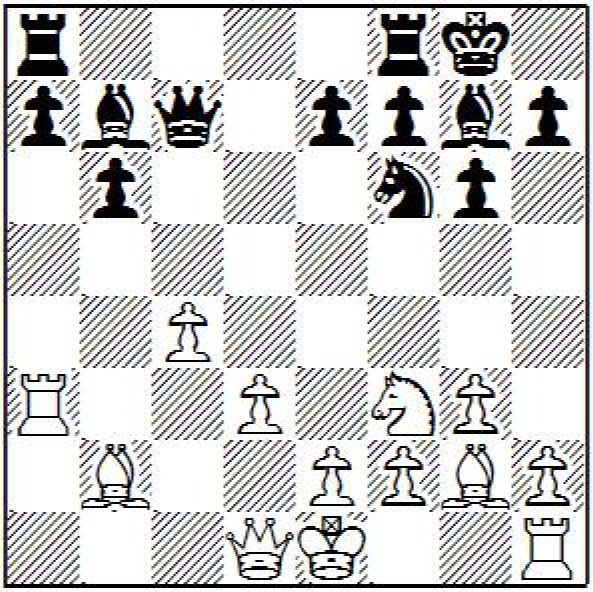
6 b4!

‘The d4-pawn needs to be isolated, in order then either to win it, or to force Black after e2-e3 to exchange it, which will give White an imposing advantage in the centre.’ (Kmoch)

6 ... 0-0 7 Nbd2! c5 8 Nb3 cxb4 9 Bb2! (9 Nfxd4 e5! 10 Nc2 a5 is not so clear) **9 ... Nc6 10 Nbxd4 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 b6 12 a3!**

What is this, if not the Benko Gambit with reversed colours?! 12 Nd2? Qxd4 13 Bxa8 was incorrect because of 13 ... Ng4!

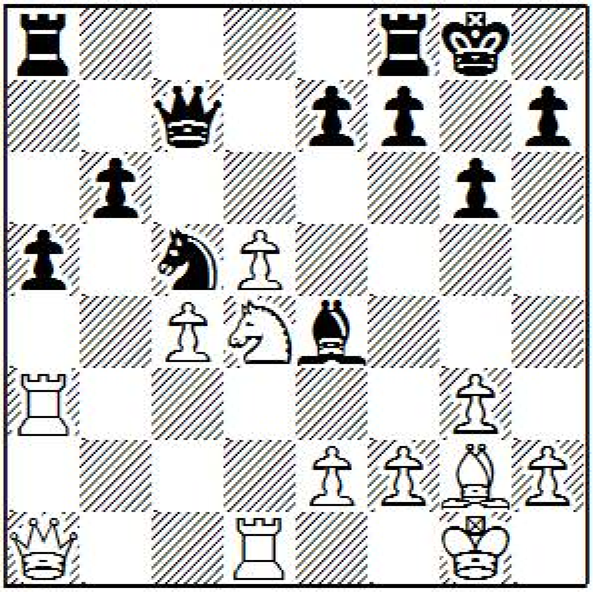
12 ... Bb7 (threatening 13 ... Bxf3 14 Bxf3 Qxd4 15 Bxa8 Ng4) **13 Bb2 bxa3 14 Rxa3 Qc7**



15 Qa1!

‘This move, it can be said, was not found, but created by Réti! It is extremely strong and highly typical of the entire variation in question.’ (Kmoch)

15 ... Ne8 16 Bxg7 Nxg7 17 0-0 Ne6 18 Rb1 (with the threat of Rxa7) **18 ... Bc6 19 d4 Be4 20 Rd1 a5 21 d5 Nc5 22 Nd4!**



‘The knight invades at c6. Rubinstein’s deep strategy has been completely defeated – a very rare occurrence: up till then his opponents had defeated him (also, it is true, not often), mainly combinatively.’ (Kmoch)

Yes, for a classic player it was rather hard playing such a non-classical position. He appeared to defend normally, tenaciously, but was literally suffocated on the queenside ...

22 ... Bxg2 23 Kxg2 Rfd8 (23 ... Rfc8!?) **24 Nc6 Rd6 25 Re3 Re8**

An important moment. Maróczy considered the least evil to be the exchange sacrifice – 25 ... Rxc6!? 26 dxc6 Qxc6+, and he was right: such a knight cannot be endured! However, all the same after 27 f3 White should have gradually won.

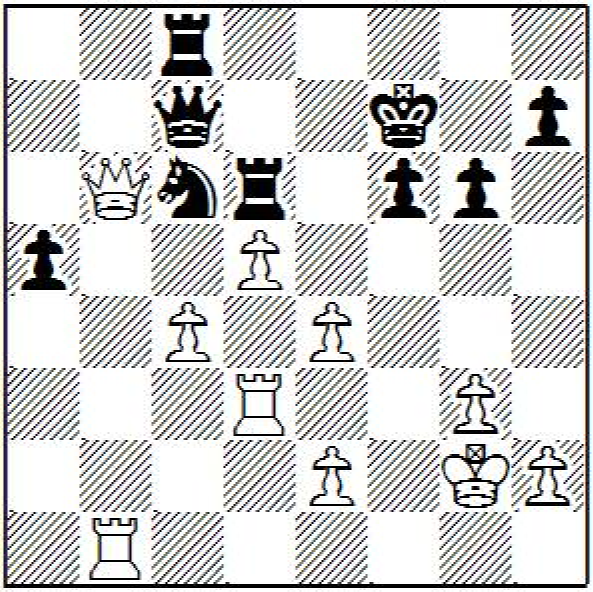
Rubinstein was relying on his trumps – the ‘eternal’ knight at c5 and passed a-pawn, but here the weakness of the c6-square and the b6-pawn are far more significant. White’s combined attack proves decisive.

26 Qe5 f6 27 Qb2 e5 28 Qb5! Kf7 29 Rb1 Nd7 30 f3 Rc8

For some reason no one has pointed out that the natural equalising attempt 30 ... Nb8 31 Nxb8 Rxb8 (31 ... Qxb8 32 c5!) would have been refuted by 32 c5! Rxd5 33 Qb3 Qxc5 34 Rd3 Rbd8 35 Rbd1 a4 36 Qa2 Ke6 37 e4 winning.

31 Rd3! (a subtle manoeuvre) **31 ... e4!?** (desperation: 31 ... Nb8 32 c5! or 31 ... Nc5 32 Qxb6!) **32 fxe4 Ne5 33 Qxb6! Nxc6**

After 33 ... Nxd3 34 exd3 the avalanche of white passed pawns is irresistible.



34 c5! (a murderous interposition) **34 ... Rd7 35 dxc6 Rxd3 36 Qxc7+ Rxc7 37 exd3 Rxc6 38 Rb7+ Ke8 39 d4 Ra6 40 Rb6! Ra8**

Or 40 ... Rxb6 41 cxb6 Kd8 42 e5 fxe5 43 dxe5 a4 44 e6 a3 45 b7 Kc7 46 b8Q+ Kxb8 47 e7 a2 48 e8Q+. The remainder is clear without any commentary.

41 Rxf6 a4 42 Rf2 a3 43 Ra2 Kd7 44 d5 g5 45 Kf3 Ra4 46 Ke3 h5 47 h4 gxh4 48 gxh4 Ke7 49 Kf4 Kd7 50 Kf5 1-0

An amazingly clean, instructional game – a model example of the ideas of hypermodernism!

Réti also played splendidly in the double-round super-tournament in New York 1924, where Capablanca, Lasker and Alekhine met for the first time since 1914.

In the first half of the tournament the ‘leader of the revolutionary modern school’ (the press definition) inflicted a sensational defeat on the current world champion. This was the first zero for the impregnable Capa since his defeats by Chajes (New York 1916) and Lasker (St Petersburg 1914).

Game 97

R.Réti-J.R.Capablanca

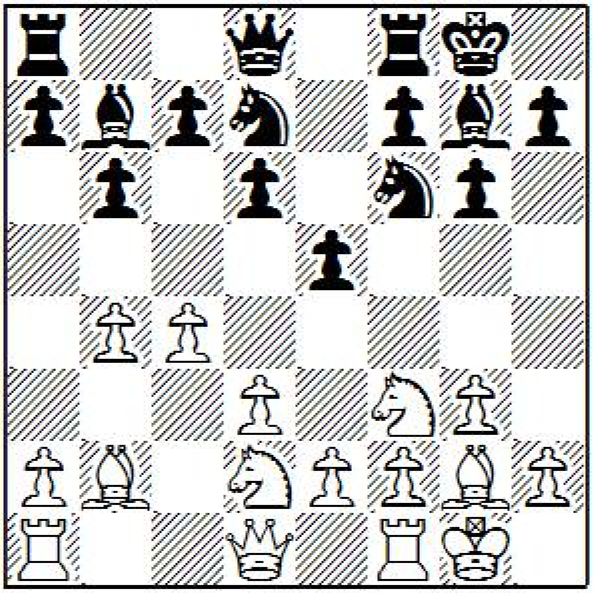
New York 1924, 5th round
Réti Opening A15

1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 b4!? Bg7

The source game Nimzowitsch-Réti (Carlsbad 1923) went 3 ... a5 4 b5 Bg7 5 Bb2 0-0 6 e3 d6 7 d4 Nbd7 8 Be2 e5 9 0-0 exd4 10 exd4 Re8?!, and here 11 Nc3! would have retained the advantage (Nimzowitsch). However, by 10 ... Ne4! and ... Ndf6 Black could have obtained a fine game, which I did at the age of 12, in a simultaneous display by the master player Katalymov at a pioneers' palace tournament (Leningrad 1974).

4 Bb2 0-0 5 g3 b6 6 Bg2 Bb7 7 0-0 d6 8 d3 Nbd7 9 Nbd2 e5

'Capablanca treats the opening simply as well as soundly and, after a few moves, obtains a perfectly even position.' (Alekhine)



10 Qc2 (10 Nxe5? Bxg2 11 Nxd7 does not work because of 11 ... Bxf1 winning) **10 ... Re8 11 Rfd1 a5**

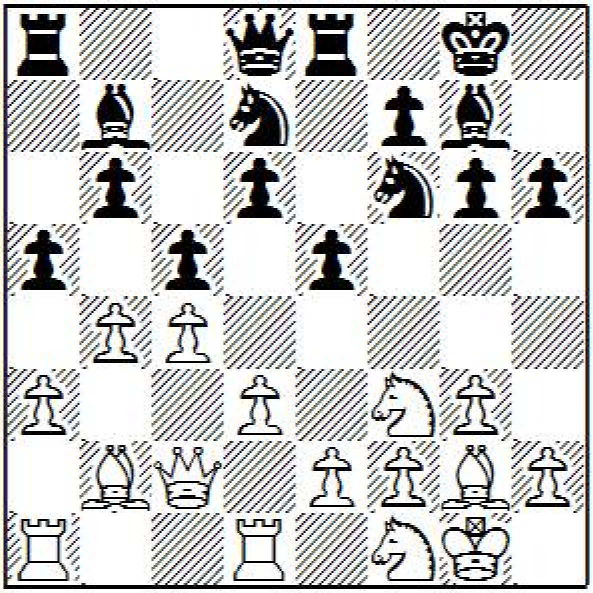
11 ... e4 12 dxe4 Nxe4 13 Bxg7 Kxg7 14 Nd4 favours White.

12 a3 h6?!

'This move, which is difficult to understand, is the best proof that Capablanca was poorly disposed that day.' (Alekhine) It is known that the champion began the tournament completely unwell, with a high temperature. True, on the other hand, a witty remark by Larsen comes to mind: ‘Not once in my life have I won against a healthy player!’

13 Nf1 c5!

‘A clever positional trap, quite in the champion’s style.’ (Alekhine)



14 b5

Declining the ‘Greek gift’. After 14 bxa5 Rxa5 15 Nxe5 Bxg2 16 Nxd7 Bc6! 17 Nxf6+ Bxf6 18 Bxf6 Qxf6 19 Qd2 h5! Black has more than sufficient compensation for the pawn: 20 Rab1 Ra6 21 Rb2 d5 etc.

14 ... Nf8

14 ... d5?! is dubious in view of 15 cxd5 Nxd5 16 N3d2! Qe7 17 Nc4 Rad8 18 Nfd2, when White’s control of c4 gives him a pleasant game.

15 e3!? (15 e4 and Ne3-d5 is really too insipid) **15 ... Qc7 16 d4 Be4 17 Qc3?**

Of course, 17 Qc1 is better, although after 17 ... exd4 18 exd4 Ne6 Black has no problems.

17 ... exd4 18 exd4 N6d7?

An error in reply. ‘Capablanca probably overlooked the check of the queen on the 22nd move, by means of which White protects his b-pawn; otherwise he would undoubtedly have selected the simple move of 18 ... Ne6, the strength of which was patent. After 19 dxc5 dxc5 20 Qc1 Black’s position, because of the effective distribution of his pieces, would have been somewhat preferable.’ (Alekhine)

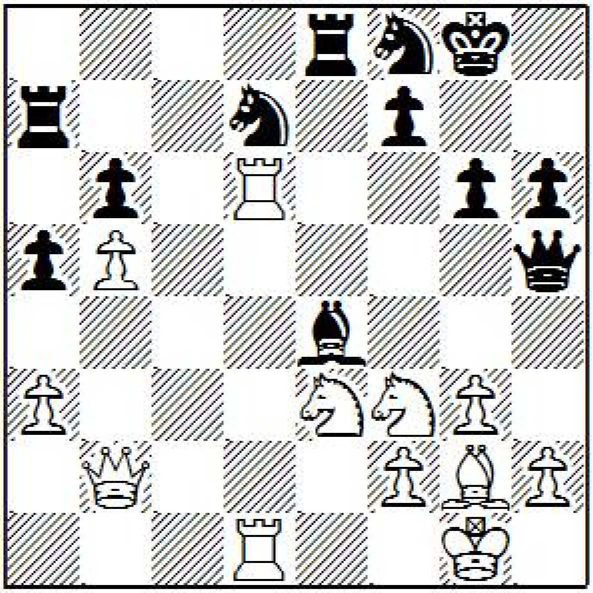
19 Qd2! cxd4?!

According to Alekhine, better was 19 ... Rad8 20 dxc5 dxc5 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Qb2+ Kg8 23 Ne3, when it would still, perhaps, have been possible to neutralise White’s advantage.

20 Bxd4 Qxc4 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Qb2+! Kg8 23 Rxd6 (but not immediately 23 N3d2?! because of 23 ... Qc2) **23 ... Qc5**

Passive was 23 ... Qc7 24 Rad1 Nc5 25 Ne3 etc.

24 Rad1 Ra7 25 Ne3 (with the threat of Ng4) **25 ... Qh5**



26 Nd4!

‘The most compelling move. White, to be sure, by means of the surprising continuation of 26 R1d5!? Bxd5 27 g4 Bxf3 28 gxh5 Bxh5 29 Bc6 etc., would have won the queen for a rook, knight and pawn, but the final tussle in that case would have been much more difficult and tedious than after the best defence possible against the move in the text.’ (Alekhine)

26 ... Bxg2 27 Kxg2 Qe5?

Undoubtedly more tenacious was 27 ... Ne5 (27 ... Rxe3? 28 fxe3 Qxd1 29 Ne6 wins; 27 ... Rc7 28 Nf3), when White would have had a pleasant choice between 28 Qe2 (28 Rxb6?! Ng4) 28 ... Qxe2 29 Nxe2 and 28 Qb3!? with the threats of Nd5 and Rxb6.

28 Nc4 Qc5

'The unfortunate queen will presently be unable to find another square.' (Alekhine)

29 Nc6 Rc7 (29 ... Rb7 30 Ne3) **30 Ne3 Ne5** (or 30 ... Qh5 31 R1d5 f5 32 Rd2 Kh7 33 Nd5) **31 R1d5! 1-0**

31 ... Nc4 32 Rxc5 Nxb2 33 Rc2 Na4 34 Nd5 wins.

The inspired Réti then gained a further three brilliant wins in succession and for more than half of the tournament held second place (behind Lasker). The main thing was that no one could resist in his favourite opening!

Game 98

R.Réti-E.Bogoljubow

New York 1924, 12th round

Réti Opening A13

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6

Alekhine criticised this move, which blocks in the bishop at c8, and recommended Lasker's 2 ... c6 (Nos.71, 108). But later, here too quite acceptable defensive set-ups were found.

3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2

It is rather too early for the move 4 b3, for example: 4 ... c5 5 Bg2 Nc6 6 0-0 Be7 7 d3 (7 cxd5!?) 7 ... 0-0 8 Bb2 d4 with a complicated game in prospect (Capablanca-Marshall, Moscow 1925).

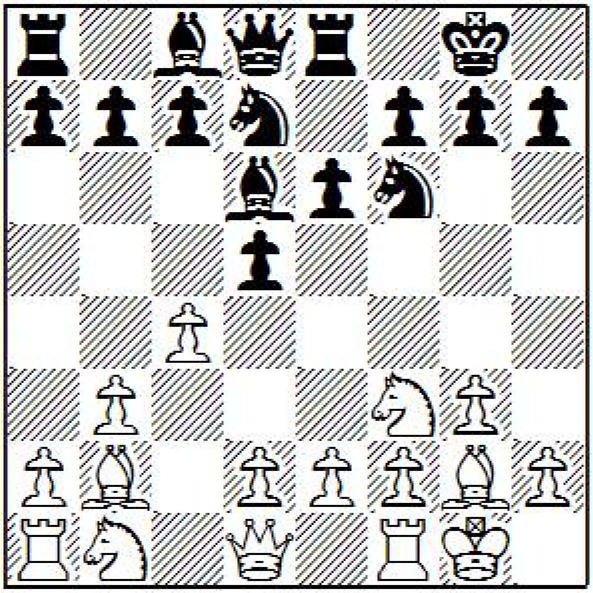
4 ... Bd6

Dubious is 4 ... d4?! 5 b4! or 4 ... c5 5 0-0 d4 6 d3 Nc6 7 e3! – a Modern Benoni with reversed colours and an extra tempo. Playable, however, is the well-tried 4 ... dxc4 5 Qa4+ Nbd7 6 Qxc4 c5 (6 ... a6!?), or 4 ... Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 b3 b6 7 Bb2 Bb7 8 e3 (8 cxd5 Nxd5!) 8 ... c5 9 Nc3 dxc4 10 bxc4 Nc6 etc.

5 0-0 0-0 6 b3 Re8?!

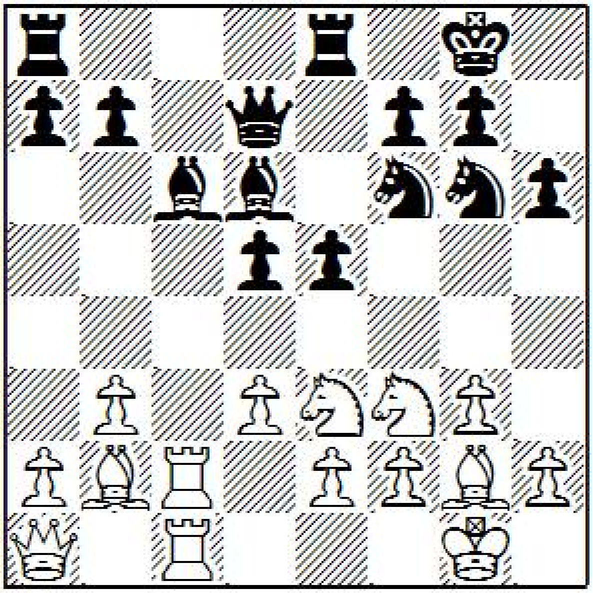
This looks like a waste of a tempo. More accurate is 6 ... Nbd7 7 Bb2 c6, and if 8 d4, then 8 ... Ne4 9 Nbd2 f5, erecting a 'stonewall' (Réti-Vajda, Semmering 1926), or 8 ... Qe7 – this set-up also occurs today.

7 Bb2 Nbd7



8 d4!

An improvement, suggested by Capablanca! In the sixth round Réti had defeated Yates in pretty fashion after 8 d3 c6 9 Nbd2 e5 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 Rc1 Nf8 12 Rc2 Bd7 (12 ... Bf5!? 13 Qa1 N8d7 Alekhine) 13 Qa1! Ng6 14 Rfc1 Bc6? 15 Nf1 Qd7?! (15 ... Qe7) 16 Ne3 h6? (16 ... d4! 17 Nc4 Bc7).



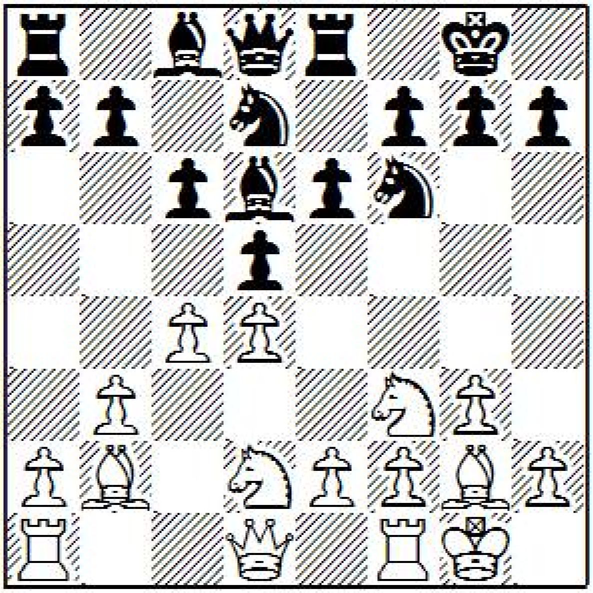
Analysis diagram

17 d4! (the explosion of a compressed spring!) 17 ... e4 18 Ne5 Bxe5 19 dxe5 Nh7 20 f4! exf3 21 exf3 Ng5 22 f4 Nh3+ 23 Kh1 d4!? (desperation) 24 Bxd4 Rad8 25 Rxc6! bxc6 26 Bxc6 Nf2+ 27 Kg2 Qxd4 28 Qxd4 Rxd4 29 Bxe8 Ne4 30 e6! Rd2+ 31 Kf3 1-0.

But it soon transpired that Black had a normal position: instead of 14 ... Bc6? he could have chosen between 14 ... Qe7 15 Nf1 Rac8 16 Rxc8 Rxc8 17 Rxc8+ Bxc8 18 d4 e4 19 Ne5 Qc7 with equality (Alekhine) and the more aggressive 14 ... b5!? 15 Nf1 Qb8! 16 Ne3 a5 (Nimzowitsch).

8 ... c6 9 Nbd2

9 Ne5!? is also good. Surprisingly, a similar position with reversed colours occurred in the 10th round game Marshall-Capablanca: 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 g6 3 e3 Bg7 4 Nbd2 b6 5 Bc4?! 0-0 6 Qe2 c5 7 c3 Bb7 8 0-0 d5! 9 Bd3 Ne4!? 10 Bxe4?! dxe4 11 Ng5 e5! 12 Ngxe4 exd4 13 exd4, and here the simple 13 ... cxd4! would have retained the advantage.



9 ... Ne4?!

‘If the liberating move of 9 ... e5, recommended by Rubinstein and others, is really the best here – and this appears to be the case – then it furnishes the most striking proof that Black’s entire arrangement of his game was faulty. For the simple continuation of 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 dxe5 Nxe5 12 Nxe5 Bxe5 13 Bxe5 Rxe5 14 Nc4 Re8 15 Ne3 Be6 16 Qd4 would have given White a direct attack against the isolated d-pawn, without permitting the opponent any chances whatsoever.’ (Alekhine)

The move in the game leads in the end to the exchange of knights, but does not solve Black’s main problem – the employment of his c8-bishop.

10 Nxe4 dxe4 11 Ne5 f5 12 f3! (the opening of the game increases White’s advantage) **12 ... exf3 13 Bxf3! Qc7**

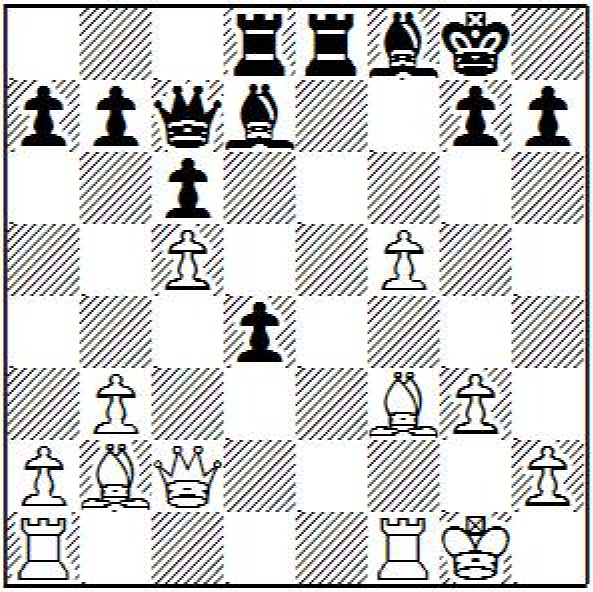
Also unattractive is 13 ... Nxe5 14 dxe5 Bc5+ 15 Kg2 Bd7 16 e4!

14 Nxd7! Bxd7 15 e4 (with the threat of a bind by e4-e5) **15 ... e5 16 c5 Bf8 17 Qc2!**

A double attack – the prelude to a series of energetic and accurately-calculated moves, which destroy Black’s defences.

17 ... exd4 (17 ... fxe4? 18 Bxe4 wins) **18 exf5! Rad8**

‘After 18 ... Re5, 19 Qc4+ Kh8 20 f6, among other lines, would be very strong.’ (Alekhine)



19 Bh5! (the decisive manoeuvre) **19 ... Re5 20 Bxd4 Rxf5**

If 20 ... Rd5, then 21 Qc4 Kh8 22 Bg4 with an extra pawn and the initiative.

21 Rxf5 Bxf5 22 Qxf5 Rxd4 23 Rf1! Rd8 (or 23 ... Qe7 24 Bf7+ Kh8 25 Bd5! Qf6 26 Qc8 and wins) **24 Bf7+ Kh8 25 Be8! 1-0**

An elegant concluding stroke. Black resigns. The first brilliancy prize!

In the next round he also defeated Alekhine, who later, talking not only about this game, admitted: ‘Réti is the only grandmaster whose moves are often completely unexpected to me.’ However, soon Réti met his match – he lost in his opening to the leader, Lasker (*Game No.71*). This clearly depressed him and after losing with Black to Yates, Edward Lasker and Capablanca, he dropped down to fifth place ...

For the highest successes the talented Czech player lacked competitive qualities and a reliable defence against 1 e4. As Tartakower wrote: ‘Réti is a brilliant type of artist, who battles not so much with his opponents, as with himself, with his own ideals and doubts.’

It was also then, in the early 1920s, that the Austrian grandmaster Ernst Grünfeld (1893-1962) revealed to the world another hypermodern opening – **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5,** allowing 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 and attacking the pawn centre by 6 ... Bg7 and ... c7-c5. The sharp, dynamic Grünfeld Defence soon won a place under the sun, especially as Alekhine promptly included it in his repertoire. Later great contributions to its development were made by Botvinnik, Smyslov, Korchnoi, Fischer ...

Generally speaking, Alekhine was quick to take up virtually all the latest achievements of chess thinking. This related not only to the ‘Réti’ (including with reversed colours), the ‘Grünfeld’, the ‘Nimzo’ or the Queen’s Indian Defence. On seeing a Moscow first category player reply to **1 e4** with the strange move **1 ... Nf6**, Alekhine substantiated and in 1921 introduced into serious competition this more than hypermodern defence, which received his name and the recognition by Nimzowitsch of ‘Alekhine’s most outstanding discovery: the move 1 ... Nf6 is stunning, it cannot be called other than brilliant.’

I should also mention the first sensational testing of the Blumenfeld Gambit (a forerunner of the Benko Gambit): **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5!? 4 d5 b5!? 5 dxe6** (5 Bg5!) **5 ... fxe6 6 cxb5 d5 7 e3 Bd6 8 Nc3 0-0 9 Be2** (after Réti’s move 9 e4!? correct is 9 ... Nbd7!) **9 ... Bb7 10 b3 Nbd7 11 Bb2 Qe7 12 0-0 Rad8 13 Qc2 e5** with powerful play for the pawn (Tarrasch-Alekhine, Pistyan 1922). Incidentally, a similar motif occurred in the match games Korchnoi-Karpov (Baguio 7th and 17th matchgames 1978), which I will describe in the third volume.

Capablanca also endeavoured not to be out of step with the times and tried playing the ‘Réti’, the ‘Alekhine’ (against Yates in Moscow 1925), the ‘Nimzo’ and other fashionable set-ups. See how he performed ‘at sight’ the

Modern Benoni with reversed colours: **1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 c5 3 Bg2 Nc6 4 0-0 e5 5 c4 d4 6 d3 Bd6 7 e3 Nge7 8 exd4** (according to Capa, first 8 Nbd2! with the idea of Ne4 was more accurate) **8 ... cxd4 9 a3 a5 10 Nbd2 Ng6?! 11 Re1 0-0 12 Qc2 Re8 13 b3 h6** (13 ... f6!) **14 Rb1 Be6 15 h4!? Rc8?** (15 ... Qe7; 15 ... b6) **16 c5! Bb8 17 Nc4 f6 18 Bd2 Kh8 19 b4** etc. (Capablanca-Janowski, New York 1924).

However, in general the Cuban was not an openings expert and he did little work in this field. ‘He had a high regard for his talent and thought that he would always outplay his opponent at the board,’ writes Botvinnik. ‘But doesn’t one have to be familiar with modern openings? Capablanca “observed” what his opponents were playing, evaluated these variations critically, and if necessary, employed them.’

An interesting observation was made by Réti: ‘Instead of applying Morphy’s principle of developing all the pieces as quickly as possible he was guided in his play by some plan based as much as possible on positional considerations. According to that method every move not demanded by that plan amounts to loss of time.’ And the main principle of the middlegame, formulated by Capablanca, was the coordinated action of all his pieces.

We will add to the portrait of the champion with a commendation by Nimzowitsch: ‘Analyse various typical positions! That is how Capablanca works. He is eternally analysing and it is always typical positions. Capablanca is familiar with a mass of such positions – mainly from the field of queen and rook endgames.’ Yes, Capa was deeply convinced that ‘to improve at chess you should in the first instance study the endgame.’

With the appearance of innovatory openings and the emergence into the arena of a new generation of masters, chess greatly revived, discovering in itself a chasm of unexplored possibilities. And by the mid-30s talk about the threat of its draw death had somehow petered out of its own accord. At any event, both Lasker and Capablanca remembered about their fears with a smile ...

From London to New York

‘I did not want to stand in the way of the young,’ Lasker declared after the match in Havana, ‘and so I am prepared to give up my right to a return match to clear the way for Rubinstein whom I rate highly.’ Yes, Akiba remained the main contender for the world championship, but after the war his success curve went downhill. And at the same time Alekhine, Réti and Bogoljubow had started to make progress ...

The first major tournament, where the new champion met his potential challengers, was London 1922. Capa started with 6 out of 6(!) and in the end he demonstrated brilliantly that he was the strongest player in the world: 1. Capablanca – 13 out of 15; 2. Alekhine – 11½ (both undefeated); 3. Vidmar – 11; 4. Rubinstein – 10½; 5. Bogoljubow – 9; 6-7. Réti and Tartakower – 8½ etc.

Here is another famous game by the Cuban on the theme 'bishop out of play' (like both *Game No.88* and *Game No.99*). As it was very superficially analysed, it generated a whole series of myths, which I would finally like to dispel.

Game 99

J.R.Capablanca-E.Bogoljubow

London 1922, 6th round

Ruy Lopez C91

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 d4 exd4?! (the first steps of theory: of course, 9 ... Bg4! is more accurate) **10 cxd4 Bg4 11 Be3?!**

Returning the compliment: correct is 11 Nc3! (Lasker-Bogoljubow, Mährisch Ostrau 1923).

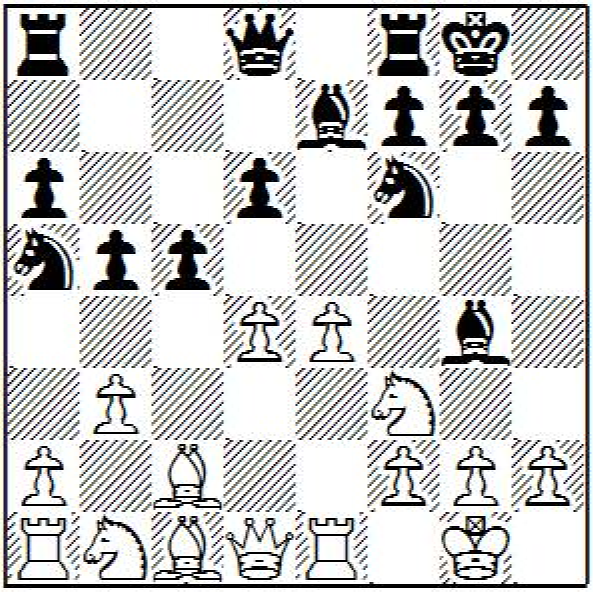
11 ... Na5

11 ... d5 is also interesting, but we will skip through the opening since it is not the main content of this game.

12 Bc2 Nc4 (12 ... c5!?) **13 Bc1**

Harmless is 13 Nbd2?! Nxe3 14 Rxe3 c5 15 Qe1 Nd7 16 h3 Bh5 17 dxc5 Nxc5 with the initiative for Black (Yates-Capablanca, New York 1924).

13 ... c5 14 b3 Na5 (14 ... Nb6!?)



15 Bb2?!

Much stronger is Fischer’s plan 15 d5! Nd7 16 Nbd2 Bf6 17 Rb1, which was tested in the games Fischer-Korchnoi (Stockholm interzonal 1962), Korchnoi-Portisch (Sousse interzonal 1967), Tal-Gligoric (Belgrade 7th matchgame 1968) and Bronstein-Smyslov (Petropolis interzonal 1973).

Now, however, Black is able to exchange the formidable ‘Spanish’ bishop and to gain the advantage of the two bishops.

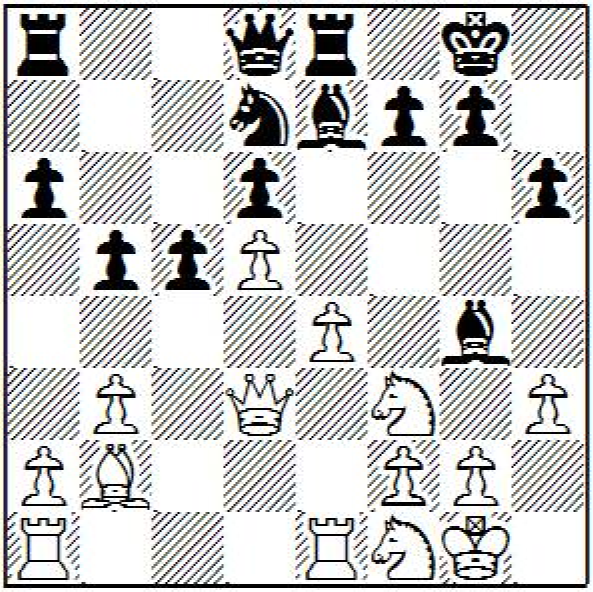
15 ... Nc6! 16 d5 Nb4 17 Nbd2 Nxc2 18 Qxc2 Re8

‘18 ... Nd7 at once would have been better.’ (Capablanca) In any event, Black has achieved an excellent position from the opening in the spirit of the Modern Benoni: no problems!

19 Qd3

Capa suggested 19 a4, in order after 19 ... b4?! to create a ‘hole’ for the knight at c4. But 19 ... Nd7 20 Qd3 Qb6 was possible, with a complicated game.

19 ... h6?! (again 19 ... Nd7! is better) **20 Nf1** (in my opinion, the immediate 20 h3!? is more energetic) **20 ... Nd7 21 h3**



21 ... Bh5?!

‘This is the turning point of the game. Black should have taken the knight with the bishop and then played ... Bf6. Failure to do this was the cause of his defeat.’ (Capablanca) A typically categorical statement from the ‘epoch of the titans’: all simple and understandable!

Of course, it was quite unnecessary to hold on to the bishop, and by 21 ... Bxf3! 22 Qxf3 Bf6 Black would have achieved the dream of any Modern Benoni devotee. However, I cannot agree with Capablanca’s conclusion: in my view the move 21 ... Bh5 is double-edged and does not yet spoil anything. It is another matter that Bogoljubow did not realise just how dangerous was his opponent’s deep plan of cutting off the bishop.

22 N3d2 Bf6 23 Bxf6 Qxf6 24 a4 c4!?

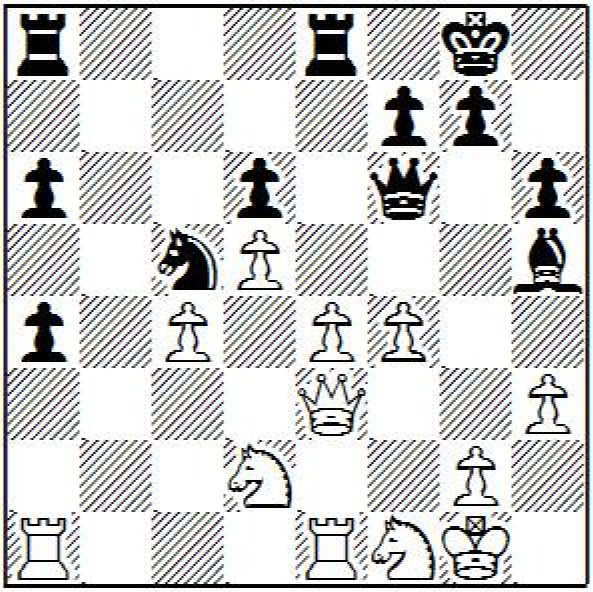
‘This move gives Black a passed pawn, but on the other hand it helps White to carry out his purpose of blocking off the bishop at h5.’ (Capablanca) Indeed, the move is very interesting and sharp: Bogoljubow, an incurable chess optimist, is playing for a win! Also unclear is 24 ... Ne5 25 Qe3 g5!? followed by ... Bg6 – it is doubtful whether the weakening of the king can be exploited, and it would appear that Black has a perfectly good game.

25 bxc4 Nc5 26 Qe3 bxa4

It is strange that none of the commentators considered such an obvious move as 26 ... bxc4!? For example: 27 f3 Nd3 28 Reb1 Nb4! 29 e5 Rxe5 30 Ne4 Rxe4 31 Qxe4 Bg6 32 Qxc4 Bxb1 33 Rxb1 a5, or 27 Ra3! Bg6 28 f3 Nd3 29 Rb1 Nf4 30 Nxc4 Rac8 with sharp play. However, the capture on a4 is not yet a mistake.

27 f4!

The consistent implementation of the plan – Capablanca's iron principle.



27 ... Qe7?!

Charmed by the Cuban's easy play, the commentators did not notice 27 ... Bg6! Yet after 28 Ng3 (28 e5 Qd8!; 28 f5? Bxf5) 28 ... Rab8 29 f5 Bh7 the f5-pawn is not supported by g2-g4 and Black's chances are certainly not worse: in the event of 30 Rab1? Rxb1 31 Rxb1 a3! White's position is altogether unenviable.

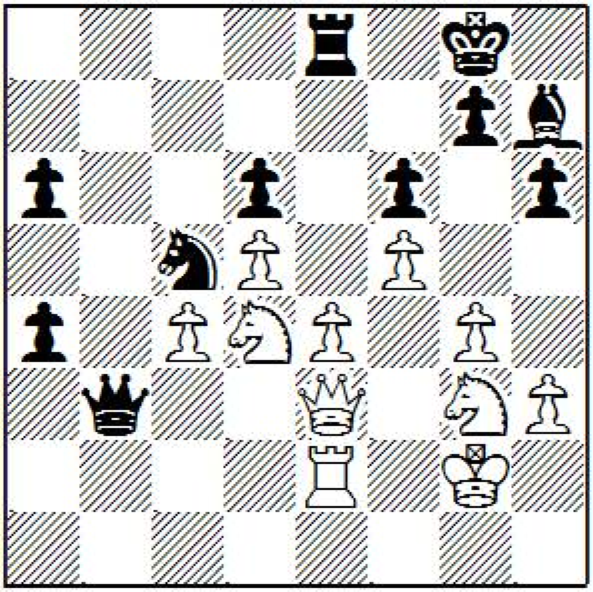
28 g4 Bg6 29 f5

As in his game with Winter (*Game No.88*), Capa cuts off the bishop from the main battlefield. But there the bishop was altogether 'dead', whereas here it can after all come into play, and in addition Black has a strong passed pawn. And although from the preceding commentary it would appear that 'the goalkeeper is already on the ground and it only remains to shoot gently but accurately at the goal,' in my view the evaluation of the position is as yet far from clear.

29 ... Bh7 30 Ng3 Qe5! 31 Kg2 Rab8 32 Rab1 f6

'The move prepares for the ultimate re-entrance of the bishop into the game via g8, f7 etc. The drawback is that it creates a hole at e6 for one of the white knights. However, there was not very much that Black could do in order to avoid the disadvantage from such a poor pawn formation.' (Capablanca) But why?! 32 ... Rb2 came into consideration, for example: 33 Re2 Rxb1 34 Nxb1 Rb8 35 Nd2 Rb2 with counterplay.

33 Nf3 Rb2+ 34 Rxb2 Qxb2+ 35 Re2 Qb3 36 Nd4!



36 ... Qxe3?

'Practically forced, since he could not afford to play 36 ... Qxc4 because of 37 Rc2 followed by Ne6,' Capablanca writes in his manual (*A Primer of Chess*), overlooking 37 ... Qxd5 38 Ne6 Qb3! (there is also 38 ... Rxe6 39 dxe6 Qxe6). Of course, 37 Ne6! is stronger, but after 37 ... Rb8 the position is completely unclear.

Thus 36 ... Qxc4! was perfectly possible. The queens should have been retained for the additional reason that White's king is bad, and this was an additional chance for Black.

37 Rxe3 Rb8 38 Rc3 Kf7 39 Kf3 Rb2 40 Nge2 Bg8 41 Ne6!

It is now possible to talk of an advantage for White, although, as we will see, subsequently Bogoljubow could have resisted more tenaciously.

41 ... Nb3

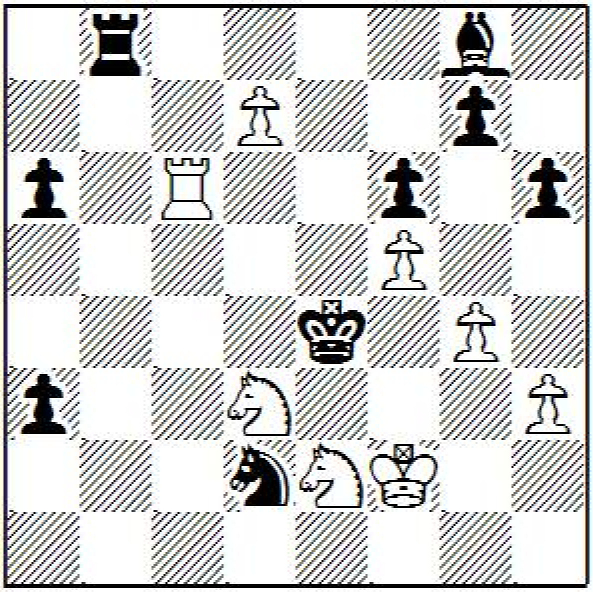
After 41 ... Nxe4 (41 ... Nxe6? 42 fxe6+ and 43 c5!) 42 Kxe4 Rxe2+ Capa gives 43 Kd3 Rh2 44 Kd4 h5 45 c5!, but I would give 43 Kd4 Rd2+ 44 Rd3 Rxd3+ 45 Kxd3 h5 46 Kc3 hxg4 47 hxg4 Bh7 48 Kb4 g6 49 Nd4 winning.

42 c5! dxc5 43 Nxc5 Nd2+ 44 Kf2 (44 Ke3? a3) **44 ... Ke7?**

Capa suggested 44 ... Nb1! 45 Nxa4 Nxc3 46 Nxb2 Nxe4+ 47 Ke3 Nd6 ‘with good chances to draw.’ Tartakower added 45 Rc4! a3 46 Ne6 Ke7! (but not 46 ... a2 47 Rc7+ Ke8 48 d6! with the threat of Re7 mate; *however, White wins only by the study-like 48 ... Bxe6 49 fxe6 Rb8 50 Rxg7 Kf8 51 Rf7+ Kg8 52 Rb7!! Rxb7 53 d7 a1Q 54 e7 Rxd7 55 e8Q+ Kg7 56 Qxd7+ Kg8 57 Nd4! Qa2+ 58 Kg3 Qf7 59 Qc8+ Kh7 60 Qxa6 Qc7+ 61 Kg2 – G. K.*) 47 Rc7+ Kd6 48 Rc6+ Ke7.

But what next? If 49 Nc5 Black is saved by 49 ... Nc3 50 d6+ Kd8 51 Ke3 (51 d7? Nxe4+) 51 ... a2 52 Rxa6 Rxe2+ 53 Kd3 a1Q! 54 Rxa1 Ra2, therefore there would seem to be only one way to win – 49 Rxa6! Bxe6 50 fxe6 Nc3 51 Ra7+ Kf8 52 Ke3 Rxe2+ 53 Kd3.

However, Black can try 48 ... Ke5!? (instead of 48 ... Ke7) 49 N6f4 Nd2 50 Nd3+ Kxe4 51 d6 Rb8 52 d7.



Analysis diagram

White still has some work to do in order to win: 52 ... Rd8 53 Rd6 Bd5 54 Nb4! a5 55 Re6+!! (a very difficult, study-like move!) 55 ... Bxe6 56 fxe6 axb4 57 e7, or 52 ... a2 53 Rc8 a1Q 54 Ng3+! Kxd3 55 d8Q+ Qd4+ 56 Qxd4+ Kxd4 57 Rxb8 etc.

Thus 44 ... Nb1! would have prolonged the game, whereas now it ends quickly.

45 Ke1 Nb1 46 Rd3 a3? (another mistake, but 46 ... Kd6 would also not have saved Black – 47 Nxa4 Rb4 48 Nac3) **47 d6+ Kd8 48 Nd4! Rb6 49 Nde6+ Bxe6 50 fxe6 Rb8 51 e7+ Ke8 52 Nxa6 1-0**

After 52 ... a2 White wins with 53 Nxb8 a1Q 54 d7+.

And so, London 1922 further strengthened the beautiful legend about Capablanca's invincibility. But this tournament is also memorable for another reason. Here, for the first time in history, the champion invited a group of leading grandmasters to adopt the standard rules that he had worked out for world championship matches. And after detailed discussion, Capablanca, Alekhine, Rubinstein, Bogoljubow, Réti, Maróczy, Vidmar and Tartakower signed the so-called 'London agreement'. I will remind you of its main points:

– the winner was to be the first to win six games, draws not counting;

– the time control was to be 40 moves in 2½ hours, play to proceed for five hours without a break;

– the champion must defend his title within a year after receiving a challenge, but he is not obliged to play a match if the prize fund does not reach $10,000 US in gold;

– out of the total prize fund the champion is to receive 20% as an appearance fee, and out of the remaining part the winner is to receive 60% and the loser 40%;

– if the champion has accepted a challenge, the challenger is to make a deposit of $500, three months before the match a further $500 (the champion is to contribute a similar amount), the guarantors subsidising the match – $3,000 and the balance before the start of the match;

– the date for the start of the match and the hours of play are to be specified by the champion;

– the champion has the right to postpone the match due to illness for a maximum of 40 days, after which if he is unable to play he loses his title;

– a new champion is obliged to defend his title under the same conditions.

Capablanca, as he put it, had decided to put an end to the arguments and misunderstandings that frequently arose during the times of Steinitz and Lasker due to a lack permanent rules for contesting the world championship. And although the agreement did not encompass all the strongest players (Lasker, Nimzowitsch and Spielmann were not in London), even so an important and historic precedent had been created.

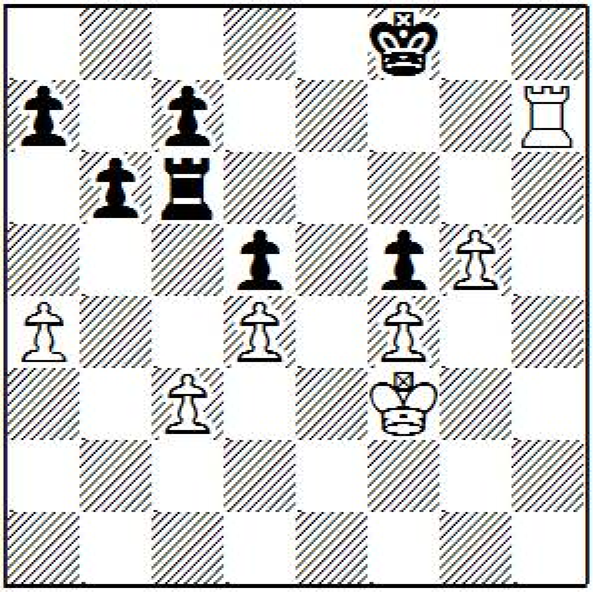
It was another matter that in the 1920s-30s the ‘golden wall’ of $10,000 was not able to be surmounted by either Rubinstein or Nimzowitsch (they did not in fact play a match), or by Bogoljubow or Euwe (they only played for the title, after raising the prize fund stipulated for the champion). And only Alekhine managed to raise the required sum with some difficulty in 1927, in order to play the ‘match of his life’ strictly under the conditions of the London agreement. At that time Capa bitterly regretted that he had insisted on an unlimited match up to six wins, but it was already too late ... However, this will be described later.

The next place for the meeting of the chess elite became New York 1924. The tournament, especially its second half, took the form of a fascinating race between Lasker and Capablanca. The ex-champion immediately took the lead and stormed ahead, whereas Capa started badly with a score of 2 out of 5, losing unexpectedly to Réti (*Game No.97*). There was nothing for it, and the Cuban began a spurt ...

Game 100

J.R.Capablanca-S.Tartakower

New York 1924, 6th round

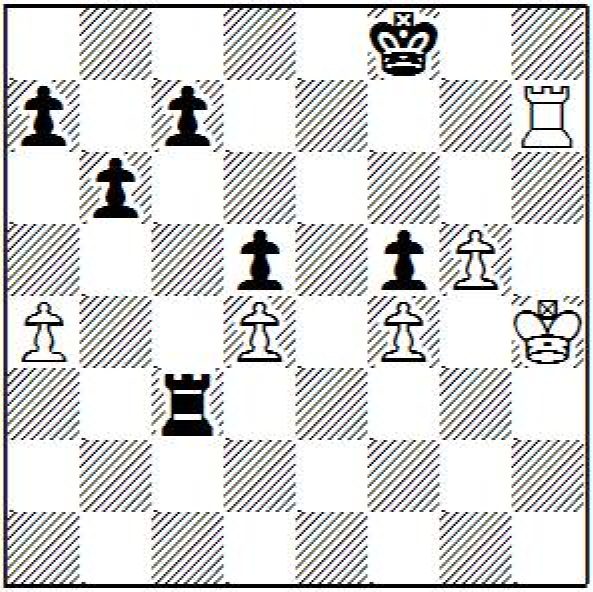


‘At first sight it is not easy to assess the chances of the two sides. The black rook is about to invade the enemy position, and White must lose at least a pawn. However, the black king is “bad” and White has a strong passed g-pawn. And if the king can be included in the attack ... ’ (Averbakh)

35 Kg3!

‘Decisive! White sacrifices material in order to obtain the classical position with king on f6, pawn on g6 and rook on h7, whereupon the black pawns tumble like ripe apples.’ (Alekhine)

35 ... Rxc3+ 36 Kh4!

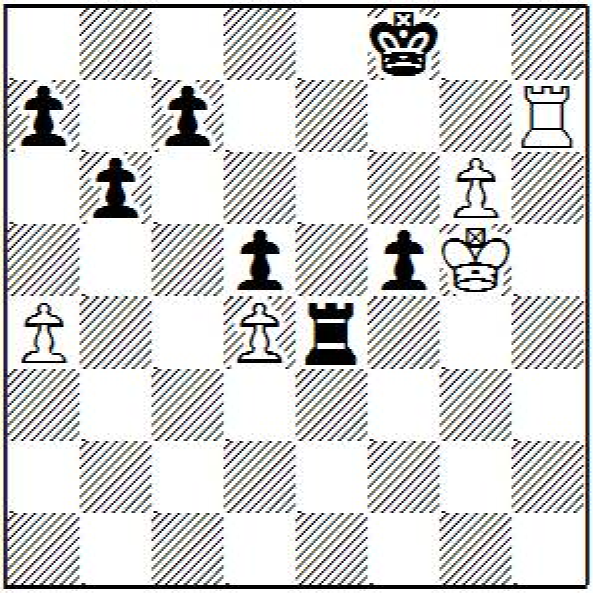


36 ... Rf3

‘36 ... Rc1 37 Kh5! Rh1+ 38 Kg6 does not help. After the loss of the f5-pawn White’s two connected passed pawns easily decide matters.’ (Levenfish, Smyslov)

37 g6! Rxf4+ 38 Kg5 Re4

The only chance. ‘If 38 ... Rxd4, then 39 Kf6 Ke8 (39 ... Kg8 40 Rd7 with mate) 40 Rxc7 Rxa4 41 g7 Rg4 42 Rxa7, winning the rook by 43 g8Q+ Rxg8 44 Ra8+ Kd7 45 Rxg8. Black did not manage to exploit his separated passed pawns.’ (Spielmann)



39 Kf6! (but not 39 Kxf5? Rxd4 with a draw) **39 ... Kg8 40 Rg7+ Kh8 41 Rxc7 Re8 42 Kxf5!**

‘Again the simplest. 42 Kf7 would not yet have been disastrous, because of 42 ... Rd8 etc.’ (Alekhine)

42 ... Re4 (42 ... a6 43 Ra7 b5 44 a5 wins) **43 Kf6! Rf4+ 44 Ke5 Rg4 45 g7+! Kg8**

Also hopeless is 45 ... Rxg7 46 Rxg7 Kxg7 47 Kxd5 Kf7 48 Kc6 Ke7 49 d5 Kd8 50 Kb7.

46 Rxa7 (more accurate than 46 Kxd5?!) **46 ... Rg1** (or 46 ... Rg5+ 47 Kd6 and Kc6) **47 Kxd5 Rc1 48 Kd6 Rc2 49 d5 Rc1 50 Rc7 Ra1 51 Kc6! Rxa4 52 d6 1-0**

A classic ending!

Altogether at the finish of the first half Capa scored 4 out of 5, including a win over Bogoljubow. I will give this also quite well-known game, to demonstrate the relative strengths of the champion and one of the contenders for the throne, as well as the level of commentary at that time.

Game 101

E.Bogoljubow-J.R.Capablanca

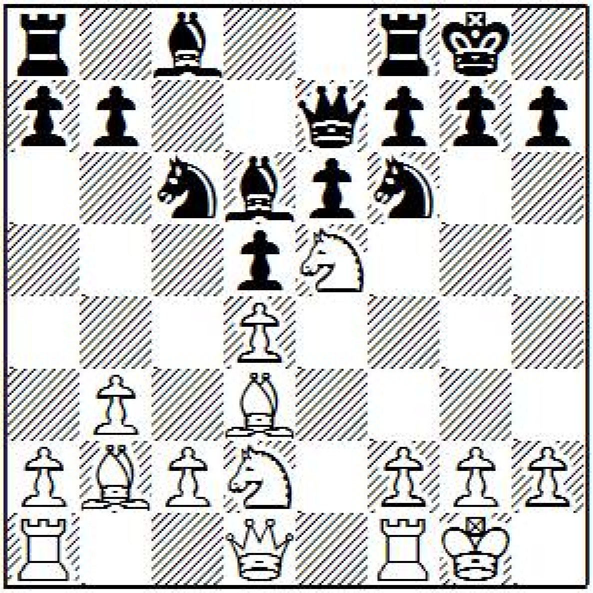
New York 1924, 9th round

Queen’s Pawn Opening D05

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 d5 3 e3 e6 4 Bd3 c5 5 b3 Nc6 6 0-0 Bd6 7 Bb2 0-0 8 Nbd2

8 a3! Qe7 9 Ne5 is more accurate, not allowing the following exchanging operation and retaining some initiative.

8 ... Qe7! (threatening both 9 ... e5, and 9 ... cxd4 10 exd4 Ba3!) **9 Ne5 cxd4 10 exd4**



10 ... Ba3!

Advantageously simplifying the position and weakening the enemy flank. This action demonstrates Capablanca’s chess vision: he sees the entire board!

11 Bxa3

Also possible is 11 Qc1!? Bxb2 12 Qxb2 Bd7 with equality. For the moment there is nothing terrible for White: Black simply has a comfortable position.

11 ... Qxa3 12 Ndf3 Bd7 13 Nxc6 Bxc6 14 Qd2?!

According to Alekhine, ‘Here 14 Qc1! Qb4 15 Qd2 Qb6 16 Ne5 was much to be preferred.’

14 ... Rac8 15 c3?!

‘To what purpose? 15 Ne5 could very well have been played at once.’ (Alekhine)

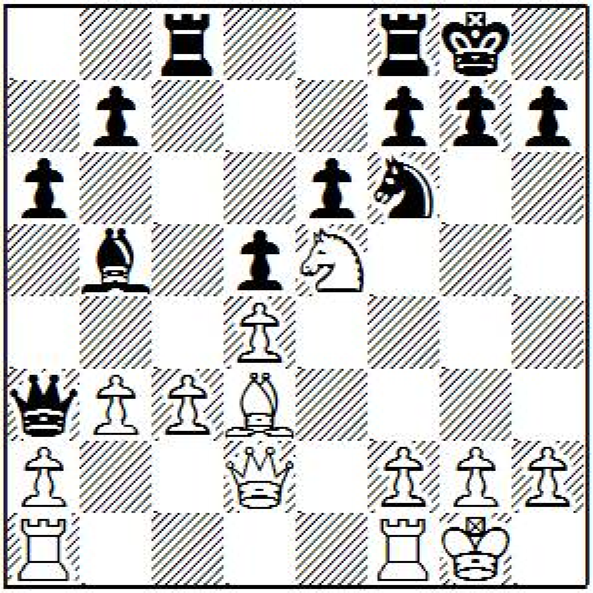
Bogoljubow’s subsequent play reminds us of how much more professional present-day chess has become. Today one cannot imagine a grandmaster from the world’s top ten (or perhaps even the top hundred) losing such a position with White, even against the world champion. It is amazing how great the gulf was in those days between the giants, driving chess forward (Lasker, Capablanca, Alekhine ...) and the rest of the elite. Bogoljubow has a lost position literally within 10 moves!

15 ... a6

Alekhine attaches an exclamation mark to this move: ‘Excellent! After the exchange of the bishop, now practically unavoidable for White, the knight will gain new and important squares for attack.’

But in my view, better is 15 ... Qa5!? 16 a4 (if 16 Ne5, then 16 ... Bb5!) 16 ... Ne4 17 Bxe4 dxe4 18 Ne5 Bd5 19 b4 Qd8 20 a5 f6 21 Ng4 with a rather complicated game – possibly Black stands very slightly better.

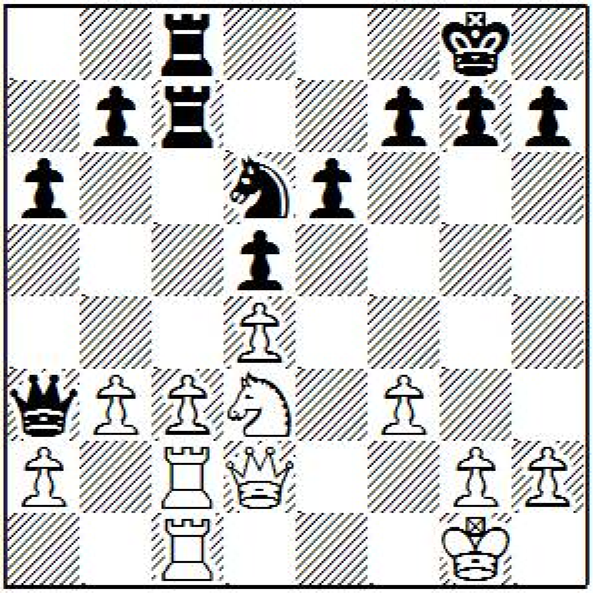
16 Ne5 Bb5



17 f3?

What for?! ‘After 17 Bxb5 axb5 etc. the opening of the a-file would have conduced to the benefit of Black.’ (Alekhine) But for some reason none of the commentators mentioned a move which nowadays would be made in a second by any master – 17 c4! Simple and into the centre! Yes, after 17 ... dxc4 18 bxc4 White has hanging pawns, but these are a double-edged weapon, and both sides have chances ...

17 ... Bxd3 18 Nxd3 Rc7 (beginning a siege of the c3-pawn) **19 Rac1 Rfc8 20 Rc2 Ne8! 21 Rfc1 Nd6**



Now White is in trouble: he has been unable to advance c3-c4 and has been left with a chronic weakness.

22 Ne5?!

‘There is nothing to be gained for the knight at e5. 22 Nc5! (22 ... b6 or 22 ... e5, 23 Na4 etc.) would have added to the difficulty of his opponent’s reaping the benefit of his positional advantage.’ (Alekhine) I think that the correct reply would be 22 ... Nb5!

22 ... Qa5! 23 a4?

A conclusive weakening – White concedes everything! 23 Nd3 really was better.

23 ... Qb6! 24 Nd3?

Of course, White’s position is already bad, but why squander pawns?! 24 Rb2 Nf5 25 Rcc2 f6 26 Ng4 e5 etc. was nevertheless more tenacious.

24 ... Qxb3 25 Nc5 Qb6 26 Rb2 Qa7 27 Qe1 b6 28 Nd3 Rc4 29 a5 bxa5 30 Nc5 Nb5 31 Re2 (allowing a spectacular finish) **31 ... Nxd4! 32 cxd4 R8xc5! 0-1**

The finish of New York 1924 was incredibly dramatic. In the second half Capablanca defeated Lasker and scored 8½ out of 10! But Lasker, despite this defeat, also contrived to score 8½ out of 10 and retained first place, ahead of Capablanca, Alekhine and Marshall – exactly as in St Petersburg 1914 (the results of the tournament are given on p.216).

Let us now move on to Russia, to the first Moscow international tournament of 1925. This was a grandiose project: the 10 leading Soviet players headed by the champion of the country Bogoljubow (who had actually been living in Germany since 1914 and took German nationality in 1927) against 11 leading foreign players headed by Capablanca and Lasker!

During those days in Moscow there was a real chess boom. Would Capablanca repeat his London triumph or would he again be thwarted by the evergreen Lasker? Their starting duel ended in a draw. Then, however, Bogoljubow, scoring 8 out of 9 against the Soviet masters whom he knew so well, unexpectedly interfered in the dispute of the kings. Whereas Capa made draws and very casually squandered his energy: on the free day he even travelled to Leningrad where he gave a tough simultaneous display (and, incidentally, lost to the 14-year-old Botvinnik – that was their first meeting!). As a result, after suffering sensational defeats against Ilyin-Genevsky and Verlinsky, he fell catastrophically behind the leader – Bogoljubow.

Their individual game took place three rounds before the finish. Capablanca was two points behind and he only had two games left (he had a bye in the last round). And the champion decided to play sharply, and to go in for an uncustomary risk: it was practically impossible to catch Bogoljubow, but ... prestige!

Game 102

J.R.Capablanca-E.Bogoljubow

Moscow 1925, 19th round

Queen's Gambit Accepted D21

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 dxc4 4 e4 c5?! (nowadays 4 ... b5 is considered acceptable) **5 Bxc4!**

In the 17th round Capablanca played 5 d5 against Zubarev, but after 5 ... exd5 6 exd5 Nf6 7 Bxc4 Bd6 8 0-0 0-0 9 Bg5 Bg4 10 Nc3 Nbd7 he did not achieve anything (although in the end he won spectacularly, gaining the first brilliancy prize!).

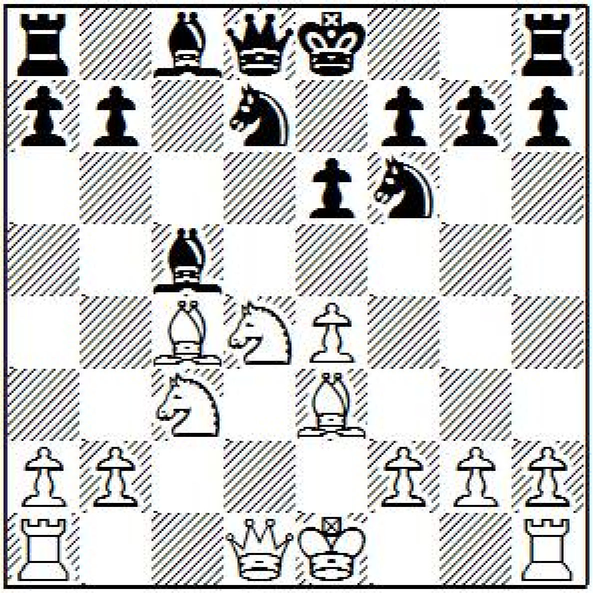
5 ... cxd4 6 Nxd4 Nf6 7 Nc3 Bc5

It is known that after 7 ... Be7, 8 e5 Nd5 9 Qg4 is unpleasant, while after 7 ... e5 – 8 Ndb5 Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 Na6 10 Be3!, and if 10 ... Ng4, then 11 Bxa7! Rxa7 12 Nxa7 Nxf2+ 13 Ke2 Nxh1 14 Nxc8 Bc5 15 Rxh1 0-0 16 Bxa6 bxa6 17 Na4 wins.

8 Be3 Nbd7?!

Bogoljubow provokes his opponent into sacrificing a piece, since, by his own admission ‘after lengthy thought I could no longer find an adequate defence for Black’ (such was then the level of theory outside of the classical Queen’s Gambit!): 8 ... e5? 9 Ndb5, 8 ... Nc6? 9 Nxc6 Qxd1+ 10 Rxd1 (10 ... Bxe3? 11 Rd8 mate), 8 ... Bxd4 9 Bxd4 0-0 (or 9 ... Nc6) 10 Bc5!, or 8 ... 0-0 9 0-0 Nbd7 10 Qe2 Ne5 (10 ... Qe7!) 11 Rfd1! with an obvious advantage to White.

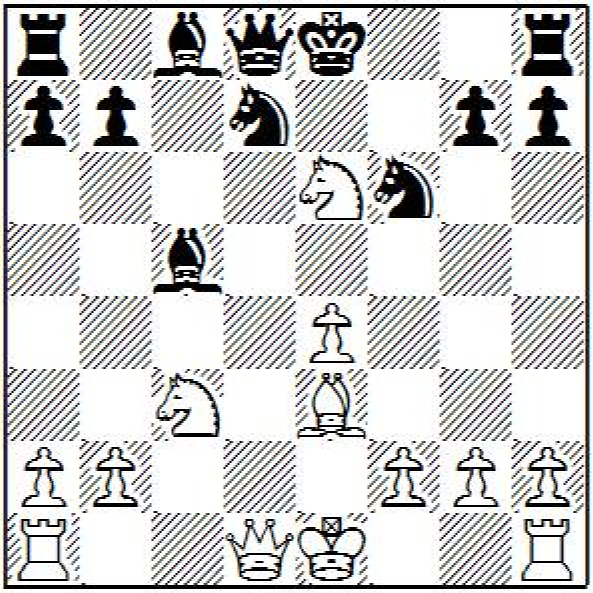
But after 8 ... 0-0 Capablanca suggested 9 e5 Nd5 10 Bxd5 exd5 11 0-0 ‘with a decided advantage to White.’



9 Bxe6!

‘Considering himself morally obliged to play for a win at all costs, Capablanca made this move almost without thinking.’ (Bogoljubow) Capa’s intuition did not betray him! After 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qe2 Qe7 (but not 10 ... Ng4? 11 Qxg4 Ne5 12 Qg3 Nxc4 13 Nxe6 Bxe6 14 Bxc5) White’s initiative might have gradually evaporated.

9 ... fxe6 10 Nxe6



10 ... Qa5?!

According to Bogoljubow, 10 ... Qb6 ‘would have given Black the possibility of achieving equality.’ After this Capa gave a spectacular winning variation in the style of the old masters: 11 Nxc5 Nxc5 12 0-0 (threatening 13 Na4) 12 ... Qc6 13 Rc1 (13 Nd5? Ncxe4 or 13 ... Ne6!? 14 Rc1 Qd7 Lasker) 13 ... Ncxe4 14 Nxe4 Qxe4 15 Re1! (15 Bc5 Qd5!) 15 ... Kf7 16 Rc7+ Kg6 17 Bd4 Qf4 18 Ree7! Rd8 (*? – G. K.*) 19 Rxg7+ Kh6 20 Rxh7+! Nxh7 21 Rxh7+! Kxh7 22 Qh5+ Kg8 23 Qg6+ Kf8 24 Bc5+.

However, even without a computer it is clear that after the simple 18 ... Rg8! there is no win for White: 19 Be3 Qb4 20 Rc5 Bf5 etc. Therefore after 10 ... Qb6 other ways must be sought:

1) 11 Nxg7+ Kf7 12 Nf5 with a rather dangerous attack: 12 ... Qxb2 13 Rc1 Bb4 14 Bd4, or 12 ... Bxe3 13 Nxe3 Qxb2 14 Rc1 Nc5 15 0-0;

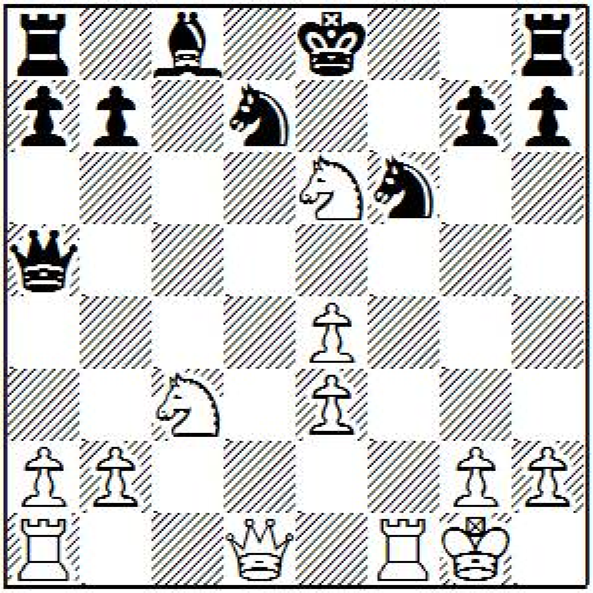
2) 11 Nxc5 Nxc5 12 Rc1! would appear to be the most accurate:

a) 12 ... 0-0 13 Nd5! Nxd5 14 Qxd5+ Be6 15 Qxc5 Qxb2 16 0-0 Bxa2?! (slightly better is 16 ... Qxa2 17 Qe5) 17 Bd4 Qb3 18 Bxg7! Kxg7 19 Qg5+ Kh8 20 Qe5+ Kg8 21 Rc3 winning;

b) 12 ... Bd7 13 0-0 Qa5 14 b4! Qxb4 15 Nd5, or 12 ... Be6 (12 ... Bg4!? 13 f3 Be6 14 0-0) 13 0-0 Rd8 14 Nd5 Nfxe4 15 Qh5+ g6 16 Qe5 Rxd5 17 Qxh8+ Kd7 18 f3 Nd6 19 Qc3 and wins.

Of course, these variations are by no means exhaustive, but even from them it is clearly apparent that in the event of 10 ... Qb6 White would have had to display exceptional resourcefulness, to justify his bold sacrifice.

11 0-0! Bxe3 12 fxe3



12 ... Kf7

‘Black had nothing better against the double threat of Nxg7+ or Nd5.’ (Bogoljubow) This is perfectly true: 12 ... Qb6? 13 Nxg7+ Kf7 14 Nd5, 12 ... g6 13 Nd5! Nxd5 14 exd5 and Qf3, or 12 ... Rg8 13 Nd5 Rb8 14 b4! Qa3 15 Nec7+ Kd8 (15 ... Kf7 16 Qh5+; 15 ... Kf8 16 e5) 16 e5 Nxd5 17 Qxd5 Qxe3+ 18 Kh1 Rh8 19 e6 are all winning for White.

The computer examines the more tenacious 12 ... Qe5 13 Nxg7+ Kd8!? (13 ... Kf7 14 Rf5 Qe7 15 Nd5 Qxe4 16 Rf4 Qe5 17 Nh5 wins) 14 Rf5 Qe7 15 e5 Ne8 16 Nd5 Qxg7 17 e6 Ne5 18 Qd4 Nf3+ 19 Rxf3 Qxd4 20 e7+ Kd7 21 exd4 Rg8 with an unclear outcome after 22 Rf8?! Rg5 23 Rxe8 Kxe8 24 Nc7+ Kxe7 25 Nxa8 Bd7. But 22 Re1! puts everything in its place: 22 ... Rg6 (22 ... Rg5 23 Nf6+) 23 Rf8 Rc6 24 Ref1 Re6 25 R1f7 b6 26 Rxe8 Kxe8 27 Rxh7 and wins.

13 Qb3 (13 Rf5?! Qb6!) **13 ... Kg6**

If 13 ... Qb6 White wins by 14 Ng5+ Kg6 15 Qf7+ Kxg5 (15 ... Kh6 16 Ne6) 16 Qxg7+ Kh5 17 Rf5+.

14 Rf5!

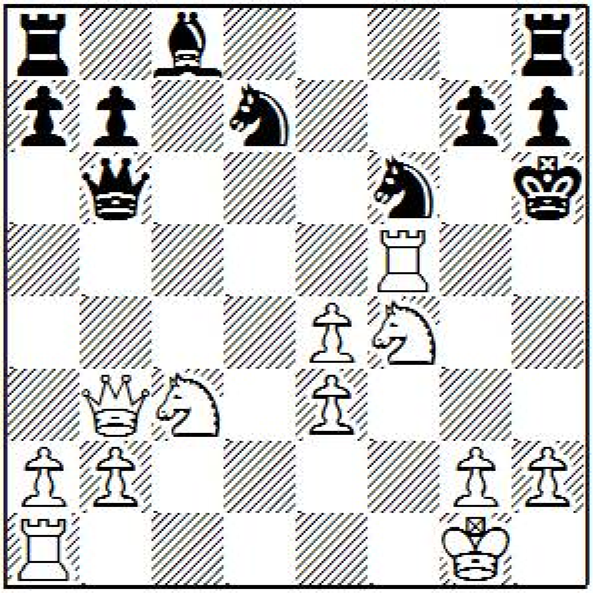
'14 Rf3 would probably win also, but the text move is better and should have brought about a quick ending.' (Capablanca) Not so – 14 Rf3? would have altogether thrown away the win: 14 ... Ne5 15 Rg3+ Kh6 16 Nxg7 Qb6! (but not 16 ... Rg8? 17 Rf1! Rxg7 18 Rxf6+ Rg6 19 Qg8! Qc5 20 h4 Qe7 21 Rgxg6+ hxg6 22 Qh8+ Qh7 23 Qe8 Qc7 24 Rf8 Kh5 25 Rh8+ Kg4 26 Qb5 winning) 17 Rf1 Qxb3 18 Rxf6+ (18 axb3 Rf8) 18 ... Ng6 etc.

14 ... Qb6

If 14 ... Ne5, then 15 Nd5!, for example: 15 ... Nxd5 16 Rxe5 Bxe6 17 Rxe6+ Nf6 18 e5, 15 ... Kh6 16 Rxe5 Ng4 17 Nec7, or 15 ... Bxe6 16 Nf4+ Kh6 17 Qxe6 (17 ... Rhe8? 18 Rh5 mate!).

15 Nf4+ Kh6

An important, highly instructive moment for ... the future contender for the crown.



16 g4?

An alarm bell: unable to withstand the tension, Capablanca commits an oversight. And yet happiness was so possible, so close – 16 Qf7! with the threat of Rh5+ and mate. ‘Of course, the world champion saw this natural attacking move, but he did not bother to calculate the resulting complicated and difficult variations, deciding that the win would be achieved more simply with the move in the game.’ (Panov)

Again this leaning towards simplicity! And yet the variations after 16 Qf7! are in fact by no means so ‘complicated and difficult’:

1) 16 ... g5 17 Ne6! Rg8 (17 ... Qxe3+ 18 Kh1 is also hopeless) 18 Rf3 g4 19 Rxf6+ with a rapid mate, although Bogoljubow’s suggestion will also do: 17 Rxg5!? Qxe3+ 18 Kh1 Kxg5 19 Qg7+ Kxf4 20 Rf1+ Ke5 21 Qe7+ Kd4 22 Rd1+ Kc4 23 Qe6+ Kc5 24 b4+ Kxb4 25 Qb3+ Kc5 26 Qb5 mate;

2) 16 ... Qxe3+ 17 Kh1 g6. Here Panov recommended 18 Rxf6 Nxf6 19 Qxf6 Re8 20 Ncd5 Qf2 (*but not 20 ... Qxe4? 21 Qh4+ Kg7 22 Nf6 Qe5 23 Nxe8+ Qxe8 24 Re1 – G. K.*) 21 h4 ‘with a winning attack’, but after 21 ... Bd7! nothing of the sort is apparent.

On the other hand, White wins without difficulty after 18 Ne6! Rg8 (18 ... Nh5 19 g4; 18 ... gxf5 19 Qg7+ Kh5 20 Ne2!) 19 Nd5 (19 Rf4!? g5 20 Rf3) 19 ... Qxe4 20 Rxf6 Nxf6 21 Nxf6 Qxe6 22 Nxg8+ Kg5 23 Qxh7 Qe2 24 Qh6+ Kf5 25 Qf8+ Kg5 26 Rf1;

3) 16 ... g6 17 Ne6! Qxe3+ (17 ... Rg8 18 Rf3!) 18 Kh1 transposing into the previous variation, although also acceptable is 17 g4!? Qxe3+ 18 Kg2! gxf5 (18 ... Nxe4 19 Ne6!; 18 ... Nxg4 19 Rh5+ gxh5 20 Qxh5+ Kg7 21 Qxg4+ Kf8 22 Ne6+ Ke8 23 Qh5+ Ke7 24 Nd5+) 19 g5+ Kxg5 20 Qg7+ Kxf4 21 Rf1+ Ke5 22 Qe7+ Kd4 23 Rd1+ Kc4 24 Qe6+ Kc5 25 b4+ Kxb4 26 Qb3+ Kc5 27 Qb5 mate (Capablanca). I should like to add 18 ... Qd2+ 19 Kh1 Nxg4 (19 ... gxf5 20 g5+ Kxg5 21 Qg7+ Kxf4 22 Qg3 mate) 20 Rh5+! gxh5 21 Qxh5+ Kg7 22 Qxg4+ Kf8 23 Qf5+ Ke7 24 Qg5+ Kf7 25 Ncd5 winning.

16 ... g5!

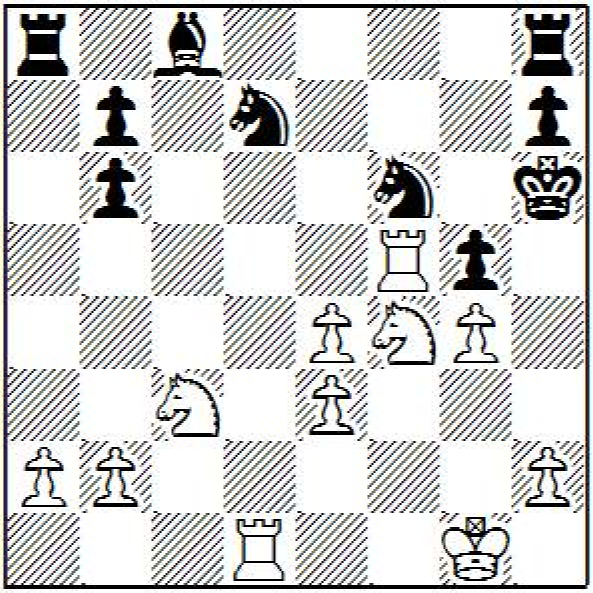
An unforeseen reply, forcing the exchange of queens. White’s attack peters out, and he has to think about how to save the game.

17 Qxb6!

It is easy to see that everything else is worse: 17 Qf7? Rf8!, 17 Nb5? Nc5, 17 Qc4? Nxg4 18 Nfd5 Qxb2, while if 17 Qd1? or 17 h4?, then 17 ... Qxe3+ 18 Kf1 gxf4 etc.

17 ... axb6 18 Rd1!

‘Although Black is a piece ahead he still has trouble to get out of this position without serious loss.’ (Capablanca) After stumbling on easy ground, the Cuban begins plays very cunningly, ‘mixing things’, I would say, in the style of Tal. 18 Nfd5?! Nxg4 19 h3 Nge5 20 Rd1 Ng6 etc. was too depressing.



18 ... Rg8?

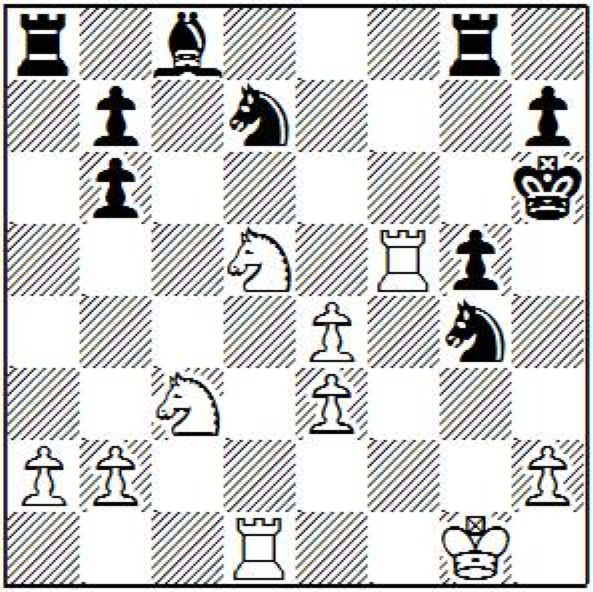
Bogoljubow wants to win in comfort. After 18 ... gxf4 19 g5+ Kg7 (but not 19 ... Kg6? 20 Rd6) 20 gxf6+ Nxf6 21 Rg5+ (21 Rxf4? Ra5!) 21 ... Kf7 22 exf4 White, as Capablanca expressed it, ‘would have had to fight hard to obtain a draw’ – say, after 22 ... h6 23 Rb5 (23 Rg3 Nh5) 23 ... Rg8+ 24 Kf1.

But even stronger was 18 ... Ra5! 19 Nfd5 (19 Nh3 Nxg4) 19 ... Nxg4 20 Rdf1 Re8 21 b4 Ra3 winning. I think that Alekhine would have found his way through these complications and would not have forgiven White for mistakes such as 16 g4?

19 Nfd5! Nxg4?

Mistakes come in pairs ... Black decided that after the exchange of queens there was no longer any play for mate, and he left too many white pieces in the vicinity of his king.

‘If 19 ... Rg6, then 20 Ne7 Nc5 (*21 ... Rg7!? – G. K.*) 21 Rd8! etc.’ (Bogoljubow) But the simple 19 ... Nxd5! would have forced the opponent to fight for a draw: 20 Rfxd5 (20 Rdxd5?! Nf8 21 Rf6+ Ng6 22 h3 Ra6; 20 exd5?! Rf8 21 Rdf1 Rxf5 22 Rxf5 Kg6) 20 ... Nf6 21 Rd6 Rg6 22 h3 b5 23 Rb6 Nxg4 24 Rxg6+ hxg6 25 hxg4 b4 26 Nd5 Rxa2 27 Nxb4 (but not 27 Nf6?! Kg7 28 e5 Rxb2), or 20 Nxd5 Nc5 21 Rf6+ Kg7 22 Rdf1 Bxg4 23 Rf7+ Kh6 24 Nf6 Be6 25 Nxg8+ Rxg8 etc.

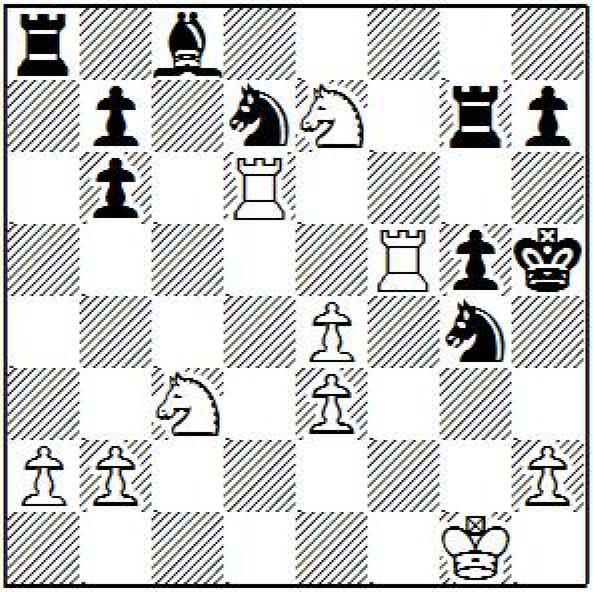


20 Ne7! (unexpectedly White's attack flares up with renewed strength)

20 ... Rg7

Perhaps the best defence was 20 ... Rg6!? 21 Nxc8 Nc5 22 Nxb6 Rxb6 23 Rxc5 Rxb2 with drawing chances.

21 Rd6+ Kh5



22 Rf3!

‘A very strong move.’ (Bogoljubow)

22 ... Ngf6 (if 22 ... Nge5?, then 23 Rh6+!) **23 Rh3+!**

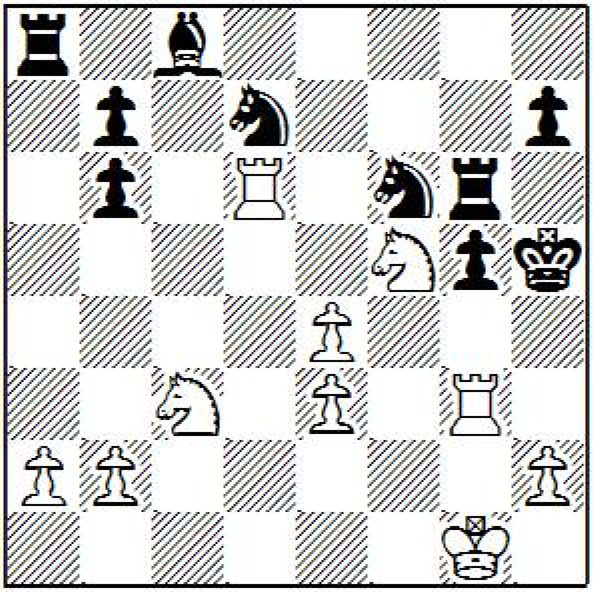
But not immediately 23 Nf5?! because of 23 ... Kg6! (23 ... Rg6? 24 Rh3+ Kg4 25 Kg2) 24 Nxg7 Kxg7 25 e5 Ng4 26 e6 Nde5 etc..

23 ... Kg4 24 Rg3+ (24 Kg2? Rxe7) **24 ... Kh5 25 Nf5!**

White already has perpetual check, but Capa is eager to create a masterpiece! Weaker is 25 Ncd5 Rxe7! (25 ... Nxd5? 26 Rh6+!) 26 Nxe7 Rxa2! 27 Nxc8 Nxe4 28 Rxd7 Nxg3 29 hxg3 Kg4 with a probable draw.

25 ... Rg6

Another key moment. ‘The position is most interesting. Black is in a mating net, but to finish the work is most difficult.’ (Capablanca)



26 Ne7?

In mutual time-trouble (the control was on the 30th move) White tries to save time on the clock by repeating moves and he misses a study-like win, pointed out later by Capablanca: 26 Rh3+! Kg4 27 Kg2 (threatening Nd1 and Nf2 mate) 27 ... Nxe4 28 Rd5! Nxc3 29 Rh4+!! gxh4 30 Nh6+ Rxh6 31 h3 mate, or 27 ... Nc5 28 Nh6+ (*28 Ne7!? Nh5 29 Rxg6 hxg6 30 Rf3! – G. K.*) 28 ... Rxh6 29 Rxh6 Ncxe4?! (*Black also loses after 29 ... Nh5 30 Rd8! Kh4 31 Kf2 – G. K.*) 30 Nxe4 Nxe4 31 Rd5 and 32 h3 mate.

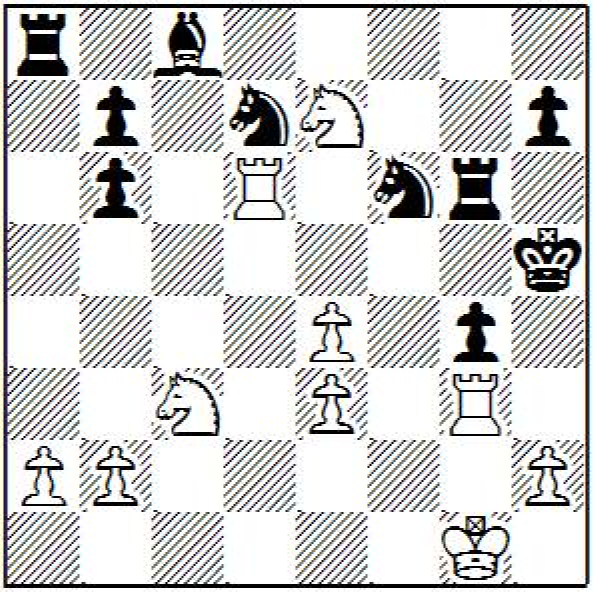
26 ... g4?

Aiming to avoid repeating the position (26 ... Rg7 27 Nf5) and to escape with his king from the mating threats, Black makes a fatal mistake. 'The idea of not moving the rook was in itself correct, only the correct move had to be found – 26 ... Nc5!' (Bogoljubow) For example:

1) 27 Nxg6 Nfxe4 28 Rd8 Kxg6 (28 ... Nxg3? 29 Ne7) 29 Rg2 (29 Nxe4? Nxe4 30 Rg2 Rxa2!) 29 ... Nxc3 (or 29 ... Ne6 30 Rxc8 Rxc8 31 Nxe4) 30 bxc3 Ne6 31 Re8 Kf7 (31 ... Nc7!? 32 Re7 Nd5) 32 Rh8 Kg7 with equality;

2) 27 Rf3 Ncxe4 (after 27 ... Nfxe4 Black has to reckon with 28 Rxg6! hxg6 29 Rf8 Nxc3?? 30 Rh8+ Kg4 31 Kg2 and 32 h3 mate) 28 Nxg6 Nxd6 29 Rxf6 Ne8! (less clear is 29 ... Nf5 30 Ne5 Ra5 31 Nc4 Rc5 32 Nxb6

Nxe3 33 Rf3! Nc4 34 Ne4 Rc6 35 Nxc8 Rxc8 36 Rf7) 30 Rf8 Be6 31 Ne5 Kh6! and ... Kg7 equalising.



27 Nxg6 Kxg6?!

‘If 27 ... hxg6 28 e5.’ (Capablanca) But even so, in this case the win for White is more difficult than in the game: 28 ... Ne8 (28 ... Nh7 29 e6 Ne5 30 Nd5!; 28 ... Ng8 29 e6 Ne5 30 Rd8 Ne7 31 Re8 N5c6 32 e4) 29 Re6 (29 Rd4!? Kh6 30 e6) 29 ... Ng7 30 Re7 Kh6 31 Rxg4 Ra5 (or 31 ... b5 32 Rh4+ Nh5 33 Re8 Nb6 34 e6 Kg7 35 e4 etc.) 32 Rh4+ Nh5 33 Rc4 Rc5 34 e6 Ndf6 35 Rxc5 bxc5 36 Na4 Ng7 37 Nxc5 Nd5 38 Rd7 Nb6 39 Rd8.

28 Rxg4+ Kf7

After 28 ... Kh5 29 Rg7! Ra5 both 30 Nd5 Nxd5 31 Rxh7+ Kg5 32 Rg7+ Kh5 33 Rxd5+ Rxd5 34 exd5 and 30 Ne2 Rg5+ 31 Ng3+ Kh4 32 Rf7! are good for White.

29 Rf4 Kg7 30 e5 Ne8

Or 30 ... Ng8 31 Rc4 (31 e6!?) 31 ... Nxe5 32 Rc7+ Bd7 (32 ... Nf7 33 Rd8) 33 Rdxd7+ Nxd7 34 Rxd7+ Kg6 35 Rxb7 winning.

31 Re6 Nc7 32 Re7+ 1-0

32 ... Kg6 33 e6 Nc5 34 Rxc7 Nxe6 35 Rg4+ Kf5 36 Rcc4 b5 37 Rb4. ‘An extremely tense game.’ (Bogoljubow)

In spite of this defeat, Efim Bogoljubow won the tournament, achieving the greatest success in his career and in the eyes of the general public becoming one of the real contenders for the chess crown. Whereas Capablanca, although he scored 8 out of 9(!) at the finish, finished only third, half a point behind Lasker (the results of Moscow 1925 are given on p.221).

Nevertheless, as is apparent from the above game between Capablanca and Bogoljubow, the difference in the class of their play was striking. Bogoljubow was a strong, talented practical player, but as regards his level of positional understanding – still an amateur. And almost every game of his with Capablanca ended in failure: the overall score of their meetings was +5 =2 in favour of the Cuban. He was also markedly inferior to Alekhine (cf. the chapter on the fourth world champion).

But this did not bother Bogoljubow. When early in 1927 the Americans invited him to New York, to a four-cycle match-tournament of the six leading grandmasters in the world, in reply he suggested that ... ‘instead of this mediocre tournament a Bogoljubow-Capablanca match should be arranged.’ And, of course, he was replaced – by Spielmann, the victor of Semmering 1926.

Initially it was planned that ‘the first prize-winner of the match-tournament (or the second, if Capablanca should be first) will become the official challenger for the world championship.’ However, by that time Capablanca and Alekhine had already agreed on a match for the crown, and this condition was removed on the challenger’s demand.

New York 1927 more than restored the shaken prestige of the world champion, who won the mini-matches against all five of his opponents: 1. Capablanca – 14 out of 20 (undefeated!), 2. Alekhine – 11½; 3. Nimzowitsch – 10½; 4. Vidmar – 10; 5. Spielmann – 8; 6. Marshall – 6.

Let us examine another classic game by Capablanca, illustrating his amazing superiority over the leading grandmasters of his era. His opponent Nimzowitsch held second place for a long time, but by the time of his fourth game with the champion, in the words of Tartakower, ‘he had evidently lost faith in his principles, if he was not simply tired – and he lost without much of a fight.’

Game 103

A.Nimzowitsch-J.R.Capablanca

New York 1927, 15th round

Caro-Kann Defence B12

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5

As we see, Nimzowitsch liked to play 3 e5 (‘aiming for an outpost’) not only against the French Defence (*Game No.92*). At the end of the 20th century this variation became very popular. For Black a considerable contribution to its development was made by Karpov.

3 ... Bf5

The most natural reply: the bishop is placed outside the pawn chain! In the Tal-Botvinnik return match (Moscow 1961) 3 ... c5 4 dxc5 e6 was tried three times – a French with an extra tempo for White. But whether he has an advantage is not clear, and now this ‘dubious’ continuation is quite popular (an example: Shirov-Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2001). An interesting evolution of ideas, wouldn’t you agree?

4 Bd3

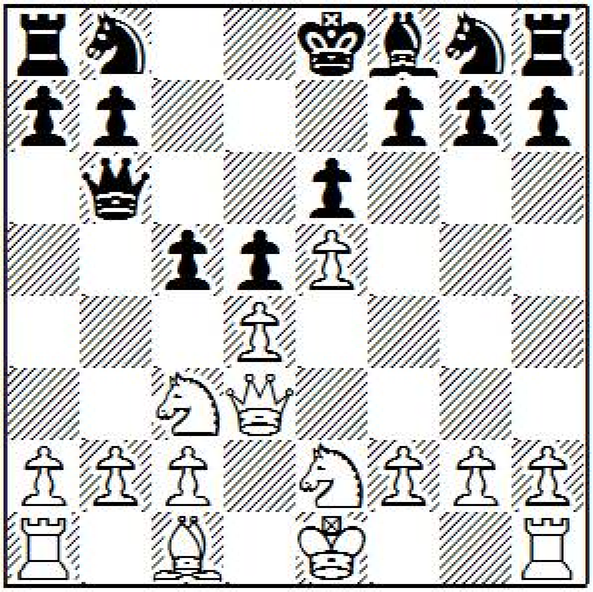
Too inoffensive: again the first steps of theory! White himself helps his opponent to finally solve the problem of his bishop and to obtain a solid position with a flexible pawn structure. At one time Tal tried both 4 c4 and 4 h4 h6 5 g4 Bd7 6 h5, and in the early 1990s 4 Nf3 e6 5 Be2 c5 6 0-0 Nc6 7 c3 was tested. But extremely popular now is the ultra-sharp set-up with 4 Nc3 e6 5 g4!? Bg6 6 Nge2, in which I was able to crush Karpov (Linares 2001).

3 ... Bxd3 5 Qxd3 e6 6 Nc3

Or 6 Ne2 Qb6 (6 ... Qa5+! 7 Bd2 Qa6 equalising is even better) 7 0-0 Qa6! with an easy game for Black (Duras-Nimzowitsch, San Sebastian 1912; Atkins-Capablanca, London 1922).

6 ... Qb6 7 Nge2 c5

‘The safest course would have been 7 ... Qa6, to exchange queens ... which would facilitate the draw.’ (Capablanca) And indeed, 8 Nf4 (8 Qg3 or 8 Qh3 – 8 ... Ne7!) 8 ... Qxd3 9 Nxd3 Nd7 10 Be3 Ne7 11 f4 Nf5 12 Bf2 h5 leads to an equal endgame, although I think that even here Capa would have had every chance of winning: there is still much play to come.



8 dxc5 Bxc5 9 0-0

White intends to seize control of d4. 9 Qg3?! Ne7! 10 Qxg7 Rg8 11 Qxh7 Bxf2+ 12 Kf1 Bd4 etc. is unfavourable for him.

9 ... Ne7

'With the idea of placing a knight at f5 as quickly as possible.' (Capablanca)

10 Na4

'10 a3 came into consideration, forcing 10 ... Qc6 (10 ... Qc7?! 11 Nb5!), which would have hindered somewhat Black's mobilisation plan. By contrast, the surprise thrust 10 b4 would not have given White anything after 10 ... Qxb4 11 Nb5 Na6 12 Ba3 Qa5 13 Bxc5 Nxc5 14 Nd6+ Kd7! (14 ... Kf8? 15 Qf3) 15 Qg3 Rhg8 16 Nxf7 Nf5 with advantage to Black.' (Alekhine) A vivid demonstration of Alekhine's imagination, although after 16 c4! White has quite good counterplay.

But the pawn sacrifice 10 b4?! is indeed highly dubious: after 10 ... Bxb4!? 11 Rb1 Qa5 White does not have any particular compensation for it.

10 ... Qc6 11 Nxc5 Qxc5 12 Be3 Qc7 13 f4

'White's outpost already causes him problems, and does not bring any benefits.' (Tartakower)

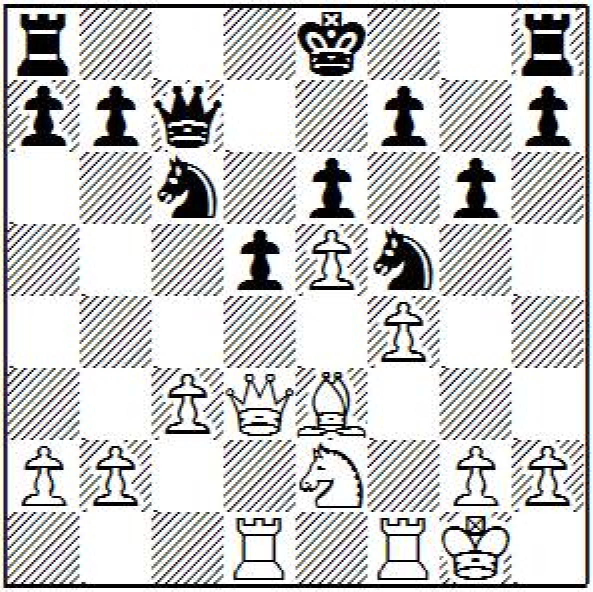
13 ... Nf5 14 c3?!

‘Because of the weak points in White’s position it was essential to play actively,’ writes Alekhine and he suggests 14 Rac1! Nc6 (*14 ... Nxe3!? 15 Qxe3 Nc6 16 c4 – G. K.*) 15 Bf2 h5 (*15 ... 0-0!? 16 g4 Nfe7 – G. K.*) 16 c4 (Boleslavsky’s recommendation 14 Bf2! h5 15 Rac1 Nc6 16 c4 comes to the same thing) 16 ... dxc4 17 Qxc4 0-0 18 Rfd1 and then Nc3-e4, ‘when he is in no danger of losing’. Indeed, after 18 ... Rfd8 19 Nc3 Rxd1+ 20 Rxd1 Rd8 21 Qe2 h4 the chances are equal.

14 ... Nc6 15 Rad1?!

‘What is the rook looking for on the d-file? White should still have played 15 Bf2! h5 16 Rac1, preparing c3-c4.’ (Alekhine)

15 ... g6



In his comments to move 14 Capablanca states that: ‘In such positions it is generally better to retard castling as long as possible in order to compel the opponent to guard against both possibilities.’ (Capablanca) The champion deliberately delays ... h7-h5, provoking White’s next move.

16 g4?

‘An unbelievable move for a player of Nimzowitsch’s class: it deprives him of any chances on the kingside and rids the opponent of any fears regarding the dark squares in his position – and thereby grants Capablanca complete freedom on the queenside. Now White’s game is strategically lost.’ (Alekhine)

One senses a certain complex in Nimzowitsch, a feeling of being psychologically doomed. In addition, he preferred Black's position – the knight on the blockading square f5! And he wanted to drive away this knight as soon as possible ...

Of course, correct was the simple 16 Bf2 h5 (if 16 ... 0-0, then 17 g4 Nfe7 18 Bh4!? is now unpleasant – Black has a 'hole' at f6! – 18 ... Qb6+ 19 Kh1 Qxb2 20 Bf6 with an attack) and now either Alekhine's 17 Rd2 followed by 18 Rc1 and c3-c4, or else the gambit 17 c4!? Nb4 18 Qa3 (if 18 Qd2 Qxc4 19 Rc1, then 19 ... Qb5 20 Rc5 Qa4 21 Rc7 b6) 18 ... Qxc4 19 Nd4! with the initiative for the pawn – the enemy king is caught in the centre: 19 ... Nc6 20 Nxc6 Qxc6 21 Rc1 Qa6 22 Qxa6 bxa6 23 Rc7. There is nothing terrible here for Black, but White too is not in danger.

16 ... Nxe3 17 Qxe3 h5!

'Brilliant! After White's almost forced reply his entire kingside becomes ossified and then Black is free to turn the weight of the struggle to the queenside.' (Tartakower)

18 g5

'Also in Black's favour is 18 h3 hxg4 19 hxg4 0-0-0 (19 ... g5!?) with the threats of 20 ... g5 and 20 ... Rh4.' (Alekhine) But now he calmly castles kingside and one already wants to say: 'the rest is a matter of technique'. However, this evaluation is somewhat premature and White's defensive resources are not yet exhausted.

18 ... 0-0 19 Nd4

'White has a strong-point, but no freedom of action.' (Tartakower) Little would be changed by 19 Rd2 with the idea of Rf3, b2-b3, h2-h3, Kh2 and Ng3: Black places his rook at c8, queen at a5, doubles rooks on the c-file, retreats his knight to e7 and begins advancing his b-pawn. The essential point is that White's king is very bad, and a breakthrough on the queenside will lead to its downfall sooner or later.

19 ... Qb6 20 Rf2 Rfc8

'The file of the future!' (Tartakower)

21 a3?!

I think that even after the best 21 Rd3 Qa5 22 b3! White would be unable to hold out after 22 ... Rc7, ... Rac8 and ... b7-b5-b4.

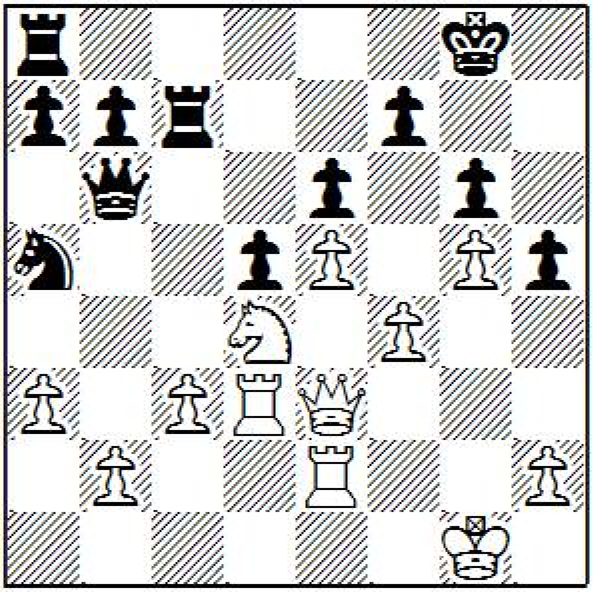
21 ... Rc7 22 Rd3 Na5?!

A serious inaccuracy: the idea of penetrating to c4 with the knight proves to be fundamentally incorrect: 'Contrary to his custom, Capablanca tries to win combinatively and because of this he merely loses time. Correct was 22 ... Ne7 23 Rfd2 Rac8 24 Qf2 Qa6, then ... b7-b5, ... Qb6 and ... a7-a5, after which the outcome would be decided by ... b5-b4 in combination with ... Nf5.' (Alekhine)

The nature of Black's mistake is perfectly understandable: his position was so good that Capa was already conducting the game simply 'by hand', disregarding possible counterplay for the opponent.

23 Re2

Suddenly White has come alive: the unclear chance 24 f5!? exf5 25 e6 has appeared.

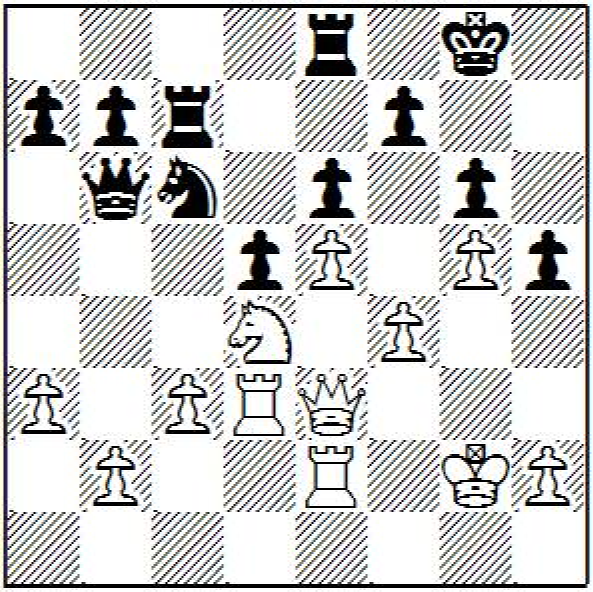


23 ... Re8

'Black was evidently convinced that 23 ... Nc4 24 Qf2 Nxa3!? was dubious in view of 25 f5!' (Alekhine) This is bad only in the event of 25 ... exf5?! 26 e6 Nb5 27 exf7+ Kxf7 28 Re6 Rc6 29 Nxc6 Qxf2+ 30 Kxf2 Kxe6 31 Re3+ Kd6 32 Ne7 with an attack, whereas after 25 ... gxf5! 26 g6 Nb5! (but not 26 ... fxg6? 27 Rg3 Nc4? 28 Rxg6+ Rg7 29 Qg3 winning) 27 gxf7+ Kxf7 28 Qh4 Nxd4 29 Qxh5+ Ke7 Black has an obvious advantage.

Therefore it seems to me that if 23 ... Nc4?! it is better to play 24 Qc1! with a double-edged game.

24 Kg2 (24 f5?! exf5 25 e6? fxe6 26 Nxe6? Rxe6 wins for Black) **24 ... Nc6** (reverting to the correct path)



25 Red2?!

‘Much better practical chances of drawing were offered by 25 Nxc6 Qxc6! 26 Rd4 (but not 26 Qxa7? b6 27 Qa6 Ra8). But even here with accurate play Black should win.’ (Alekhine) This is not so: the exchange of knights would have eased White’s defence!

25 ... Rec8 (25 ... Ne7!) **26 Re2** (26 Nxc6!) **26 ... Ne7!** (at last!) **27 Red2 Rc4!**

‘A magic square.’ (Tartakower) ‘There begins the concluding phase of the game, which Capablanca conducts clearly and confidently.’ (Alekhine)

28 Qh3?! (28 Qf2 was nevertheless better) **28 ... Kg7!**

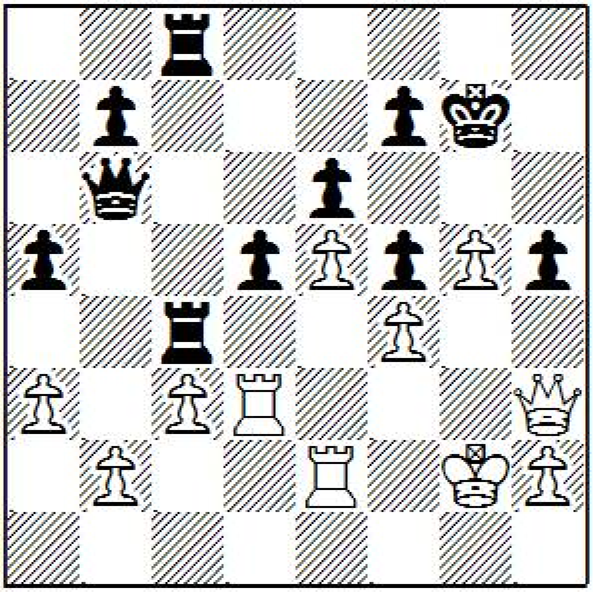
Preparing ... Nf5. ‘Consolidation never does any harm. With amazing skill Capablanca suppresses all the opponent’s attempts and then forces him to dance to Black’s “positional” tune. White has absolutely no counterplay.’ (Tartakower)

29 Rf2?! (29 Qe3 was more tenacious) **29 ... a5 30 Re2 Nf5!**

(at just the right moment: White is forced to exchange) **31 Nxf5+**

If 31 Red2, then 31 ... Nxd4 32 Rxd4 Rxd4 33 cxd4 Qb5! 34 Qf3 Rc1! (Capablanca).

31 ... gxf5



32 Qf3

32 Qxh5? Rh8 33 Qf3 Rh4! was completely bad for White, for example: 34 Qf2 Qxf2+ 35 Rxf2 Rcxf4 36 Rxf4 Rxf4 37 Rd4 Rxd4 38 cxd4 Kg6 39 h4 Kh5 40 Kg3 a4 41 Kh3 f4 winning.

32 ... Kg6 33 Red2 Re4! (decisive centralisation) **34 Rd4 Rc4 35 Qf2 Qb5! 36 Kg3**

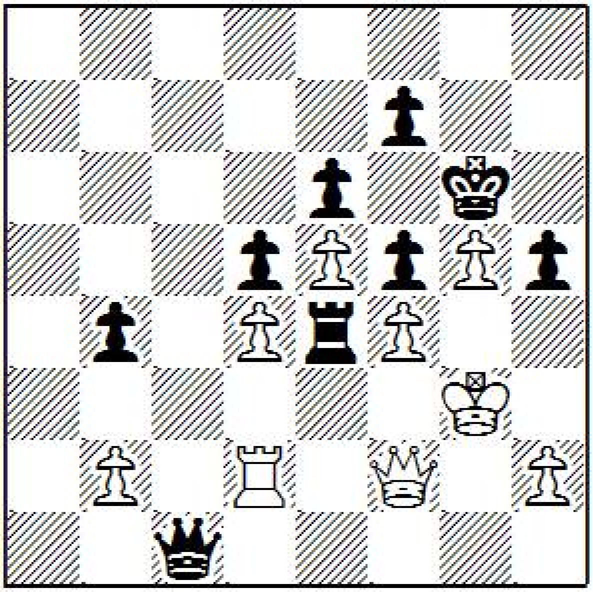
'If 36 Rxc4 Qxc4 37 Rd4 Black would have probably replied 37 ... Qb3.' (Alekhine) And then ... b7-b5-b4.

36 ... Rcxd4! 37 cxd4 (37 Rxd4? Re2) **37 ... Qc4! 38 Kg2 b5**

'The pawn moves have the aim of eliminating possible targets for the opponent's counterplay. This is typical of the Cuban grandmaster's method of thinking.' (Alekhine)

39 Kg1 b4 40 axb4 axb4 41 Kg2 Qc1! 42 Kg3

'White has no good moves. If 42 h4, then 42 ... b3 with zugzwang.' (Panov)



42 ... Qh1!

‘The quickest way to the goal, depriving the stalemated opponent even of king moves. In this “geometrical” game, which is one of Capablanca’s best achievements, there was essentially no struggle, but only ... the demonstration of a theorem!’ (Tartakower)

43 Rd3

Also hopeless was 43 Qg2 (43 Qf3 h4+) 43 ... Qxg2+ 44 Rxg2 Rxd4 or 43 Re2 Rxe2 44 Qxe2 Qg1+ and ... Qxd4.

43 ... Re1 (threatening ... Rf1) **44 Rf3 Rd1 45 b3** (45 Kh3 Rd2! or 45 Rb3 Qe4 46 Rxb4 Rd3+ 47 Kh4 Rf3) **45 ... Rc1! 46 Re3**

Zugzwang: 46 h3 Rg1+ 47 Kh4 Rg4 mate!, 46 Qd2 h4+!, 46 Qe2 Qg1+ 47 Qg2 Qxd4 or 46 Kh3 Rc2!

46 ... Rf1! 0-1

In view of 47 Qe2 Qg1+ 48 Kh3 Re1!! White resigned. ‘One might suppose from this game that Capablanca had carefully read *My System* and then used all the theories contained therein against their inventor!’ (Keene)

And so, during his six years on the throne the Cuban lost only three games, and he won, with enviable ease, more than forty. It appeared no one could threaten his supremacy ...

‘Speaking about Capablanca means asking yourself the question, what super-qualities must a modern player possess, to become world champion?’

wrote Tartakower. ‘In reply to this we would give two points: 1) the voluntary renunciation of the predominance of artistry in favour of the predominance of technique; 2) the introduction of some new principle into the game, and in Capablanca’s case: the division of overall strategy into individual moves (“the cinema principle in chess!”).’

Buenos Aires through the Eyes of Capablanca

The Capablanca-Alekhine match (Buenos Aires 1927) occupies a special place in history as a duel between two chess geniuses, at the height of their powers and talent. Therefore I will describe it twice, first from the viewpoint of the loser, and then, naturally, in the chapter about the winner.

The clear favourite was considered to be Capablanca. This was due both to the score of his previous meetings with Alekhine (+3 =7, not counting two won exhibition games) and to his triumph in New York 1927, reinforced by a spectacular win over the challenger with the black pieces. In a complicated, unfamiliar Modern Benoni-type position the champion displayed a deep understanding of chess and splendidly exploited his opponent’s mistakes. ‘As a consequence of my poor play,’ wrote Alekhine, ‘the value of this game is zero, but its psychological importance – not for the loser, but for the broad public – was enormous. There is no doubt that because of this game 95% of the so-called competent critics began trying to convince the entire chess world that there would be no struggle as such: there would be a rout.’

For example, Spielmann stated that Alekhine would not win a single game: ‘In the form that Capablanca showed in New York, he is invincible! ... I think that he will be on the throne for a long time yet.’

Apparently Capablanca himself also came to believe in this. Besides, he had another important advantage on his side: although the winner was to be the first to win six games (not counting draws), with a score of 5-5 the match would be considered to have ended in a draw and the champion would retain his title. A well-known pre-match statement by Alekhine involuntarily comes to mind: ‘I have thoroughly prepared for the battle, but even so I cannot imagine how I will be able to win six games against Capablanca. However, I can imagine even less how he will win six games against me.’ Capa did not need to: five wins were sufficient for him – then the match would have been continued only in order to divide the prize fund.

Nowadays, due to the influence of my first match with Karpov, unlimited matches have the reputation of being excessively prolonged and uninteresting. But the match in Buenos Aires, which lasted 73 days, was not like that – even despite the abundance of draws and the uncommonly monotonous choice of openings (32 Queen’s Gambits out of 34 games). It was an extremely tenacious, nervy and tense struggle, with numerous fine attacks and counterattacks, with models of positional manoeuvring and resourceful defence. And, as usual, with dramatic mistakes ...

It seems to me that up till now the chess content of his ‘match of giants’ has not been properly evaluated, and I will try as far as possible, with both human and machine analysis, to fill this gap.

The match began with a sensational defeat for Capablanca, who played the first game simply dreadfully! He opened with 1 e4, received in reply a French Defence and half-heartedly and insipidly exchanged on d5. And he was effectively lost after 17 moves, although the conversion of the advantage took until the 43rd move. Capa did not play 1 e4 again – and, it would seem, he was correct not to do so ...

But already in the third game the champion gained a fine revenge, and then, after three draws, he easily and confidently won the seventh. This game is noteworthy not only for the wonderful play of the Cuban, but also for the amazingly poor analytical standard of the subsequent commentaries.

Game 104

J.R.Capablanca-A.Alekhine

World Championship Match, Buenos Aires 1927, 7th game

Queen’s Gambit D52

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 Nbd7 5 Bg5 c6 6 e3 Qa5

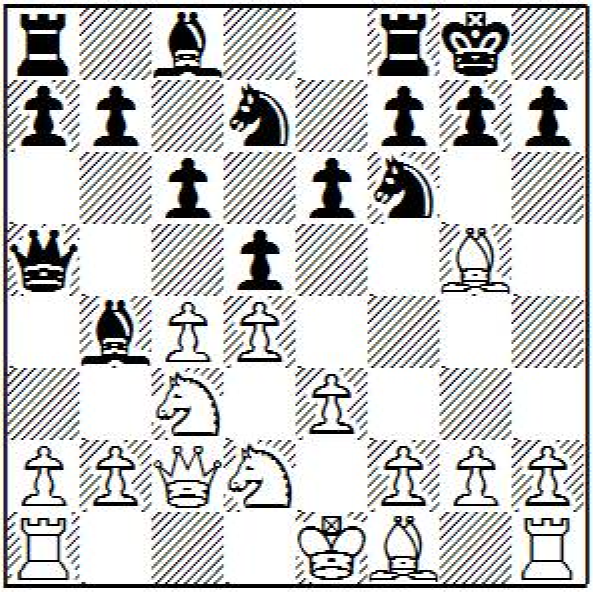
In Buenos Aires the Cambridge Springs Defence was Alekhine’s main weapon with Black, and the resulting opening dispute became the prototype of future theoretical battles in matches for the world crown.

7 Nd2

Excessively modest is 7 Bxf6 Nxf6 8 Bd3 Bb4 9 Qb3 dxc4 10 Bxc4 0-0 11 0-0 Bxc3 12 bxc3 b6 13 Ne5 Bb7 14 Be2 c5 15 Nc4 Qa6 16 Qb2 Bd5! 17 Ne5 Qc8 18 a4 Nd7 19 c4 Be4 20 Nxd7 Qxd7 21 dxc5 bxc5 with a rapid draw (Capablanca-Ed. Lasker, New York 1924).

Sharper is 7 cxd5 Nxd5 8 Qd2 Bb4 9 Rc1 (as, for example, in the games Bogoljubow-Alekhine, Germany/Holland 12th matchgame 1929, and Kasparov-Smyslov, Vilnius 3rd matchgame 1984), or 8 ... N7b6 9 Bd3!? (Alekhine-Euwe, Holland 25th matchgame 1935), but not the harmless 9 Nxd5 Qxd2+ 10 Nxd2 exd5 11 Bd3 a5 (Karpov-Kasparov, Moscow 47th matchgame 1984/85).

7 ... Bb4 8 Qc2 0-0 (later the challenger switched to 8 ... dxc4 – *Game Nos.106, 125*)



9 Bh4!?

It would appear that this interesting reply surprised Alekhine: he thought for a long time. 9 Be2 was usually played, when Bogoljubow replied 9 ... e5, while later 9 ... c5!? became fashionable.

9 ... c5

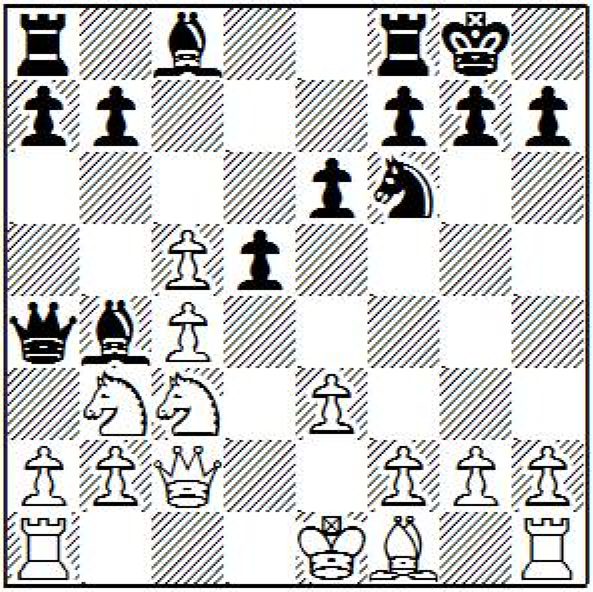
‘I lost the game mainly because I was very tempted by the reply 9 ... e5. I spent a great deal of time considering all the complications associated with this move, and in the end I rejected it: after 10 dxe5 Ne4 11 Ndxe4 dxe4 12 e6! Ne5 13 exf7+ Rxf7 14 0-0-0! White retains the better chances.’

(Alekhine) I agree that after 14 ... Bxc3?! 15 Qxc3 Qxc3+ 16 bxc3 Bf5 17 Rd4 he has a favourable endgame, but 14 ... Bf5! is stronger.

10 Nb3 Qa4!?

‘A bold pawn sacrifice. After 10 ... Qc7 11 Bg3 Qc6 12 a3! White has the advantage.’ (Panov) Which would have evaporated in the event of 12 dxc5 dxc4 13 Bxc4 Nxc5 14 0-0 Bxc3 15 Nxc5 Qxc5 16 Qxc3 Ne4.

11 Bxf6 Nxf6 (of course, not 11 ... gxf6?! 12 cxd5 exd5 13 Qd2) **12 dxc5**



12 ... Ne4?!

Starting with the ninth move, Alekhine thought for more than an hour! And, as often happens in such cases, he deviated from the correct path:

1) 12 ... Qc6 13 a3 (13 cxd5 exd5 is level) 13 ... Bxc5 14 cxd5 exd5 15 Nxd5 (15 Bb5 Qd6! equalises) 15 ... Qxd5 16 Nxc5 b6!? (after 16 ... Bf5 17 Qc4 Qxc4 18 Bxc4 Rac8 19 Rc1 Rxc5 20 Bxf7+ Kxf7 21 Rxc5 White is slightly better) 17 Nb3 Bf5 18 Qc4 Qe5 with counterplay for the pawn;

2) 12 ... Bxc3+ 13 Qxc3 Ne4 14 Qd4 Qb4+ 15 Ke2 e5! (inferior is 15 ... Qxc4+ 16 Ke1 Qc2 17 Be2) 16 Qxe5 Qxc4+ 17 Ke1 Qb4+ 18 Ke2 with equal chances, or 14 Qa5 Qxa5+ 15 Nxa5 Nxc5 16 cxd5 exd5 17 Rac1 and White merely has a purely symbolic advantage.

13 cxd5?!

An error not mentioned by anyone. 13 Bd3! is more accurate, for example: 13 ... Bxc3+ (but not 13 ... Nxc5? 14 Bxh7+ Kh8 15 Nxc5) 14 bxc3 dxc4 15 Bxe4 cxb3 16 Bxh7+ Kh8 17 Qe4 Qa5! 18 Qh4 Qxc3+ 19 Ke2 g5 20 Qh6 Qg7 21 Qxg7+ Kxg7 22 Bd3 bxa2 23 Rxa2 with somewhat the better endgame.

13 ... Bxc3+?

Strangely enough, almost everyone missed the simple 13 ... Nxc5! 14 Rc1! (14 0-0-0!? Soultanbéieff; 14 Rd1 exd5 15 Rxd5?! Be6 etc. is pointless) 14 ... Ne4! (only 14 ... exd5? 15 Nxc5 Qxc2 16 Rxc2 Bxc5 17 Nxd5 was suggested) with inevitable equality after either 15 Bd3 (15 Qxe4?? Bxc3+) 15 ... exd5 16 0-0 Bxc3 17 bxc3 Be6, or 15 dxe6 Bxe6 16 Bd3 Qxa2 17 Bxe4 Bxb3 18 Bxh7+ Kh8 19 0-0 Bxc2 20 Nxa2 Bxh7 21 Nxb4 Rad8 22 Rfd1 Rxd1+ 23 Rxd1 Rc8 24 Kf1 a5 25 Nd3 Rc2 26 b3 Rc3.

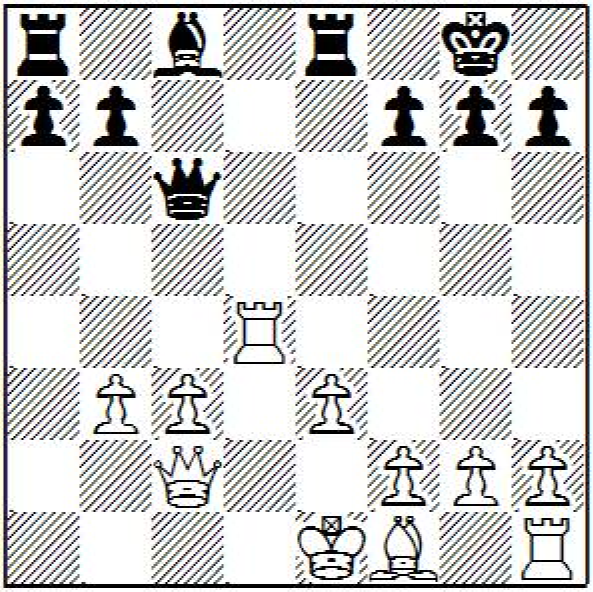
14 bxc3 Nxc5 (or 14 ... exd5 15 Bd3 Be6 16 0-0 Rfc8 17 c4!) **15 Rd1!**

When he exchanged on c3 Alekhine was probably hoping for 15 dxe6?! Bxe6 and he overlooked this energetic move, which gives White both an extra pawn and an attack.

15 ... exd5 (if 15 ... Rd8, then 16 Rd4! Qa3 17 Nxc5 Qxc5 18 Bd3) **16 Rxd5 Nxb3?!**

It is probable that 16 ... b6, as suggested by Lasker, is slightly better, but it would not have changed fundamentally the evaluation of the position: 17 Rd4! (17 Be2? Be6 equalises; 17 Rd2!?) 17 ... Qc6 18 Nxc5 bxc5 19 Rh4 f5 20 Bc4+ Kh8 21 0-0 Bb7 22 f3 Rad8 23 Rf4, or 18 Bc4!? Ne6 19 Rh4 h6 20 Bd3 f5 21 0-0 Bb7 22 f3, in both cases with an obvious advantage to White.

17 axb3 Qc6 18 Rd4 (an ideal post for the rook) **18 ... Re8**



19 Bd3!?

‘After the loss of the pawn Black’s position has become hopeless. Capablanca could have also decided the game by the simpler 19 e4 followed by f2-f3, but the way chosen by him is far more elegant. In my view, the concluding attack is one of his best tactical achievements.’ (Alekhine)

Indeed, 19 e4! would have guaranteed White a firm advantage: 19 ... Be6 20 Bc4 Rad8 21 Rxd8 Rxd8 22 Bxe6 Qxe6 23 0-0. But – a rare instance! – Capa preferred, as he himself put it, ‘a bold transition to a counterattack’ and the ‘extremely interesting play’ with the king in the centre. This shows that, if he desired, he could play sharply, creatively, demonstrating fresh ideas. Especially if he was in an excellent frame of mind and realised that he was not especially risking anything ...

19 ... Qxg2 20 Bxh7+ Kf8 (or 20 ... Kh8 21 Be4 Qh3 22 Rg1 etc.) **21 Be4 Qh3 22 Qd2! Be6 23 c4 a5**

Parrying Qb4+.

24 Rg1!

Returning the pawn for an attack. Dangerous was 24 Bxb7? Rab8 25 Bc6 Rxb3 26 Qd1 Rb6 27 Bxe8 Qg2 with complications.

24 ... Qxh2

The best chance. Soultanbéieff's (and later Golombek's) recommendation of 24 ... Qh6?! is more than dubious on account of 25 Bxb7 Rab8 26 Bc6 Rxb3 27 Qd1! (an important nuance) 27 ... Rbb8 28 Bxe8, for example: 28 ... Qxh2 29 Rf1 Rxe8 (29 ... Kxe8 30 Qa4+) 30 Qb3 Bh3 31 Rh4! Qg2 32 Rh8+ Ke7 33 Qa3+ Kf6 34 Qd6+ Re6 35 Qf4+ Kg6 36 Rxh3! Qxh3 37 Rg1+ Kh7 38 Qxf7 and wins.

25 Rh1 Qc7 26 Qb2!

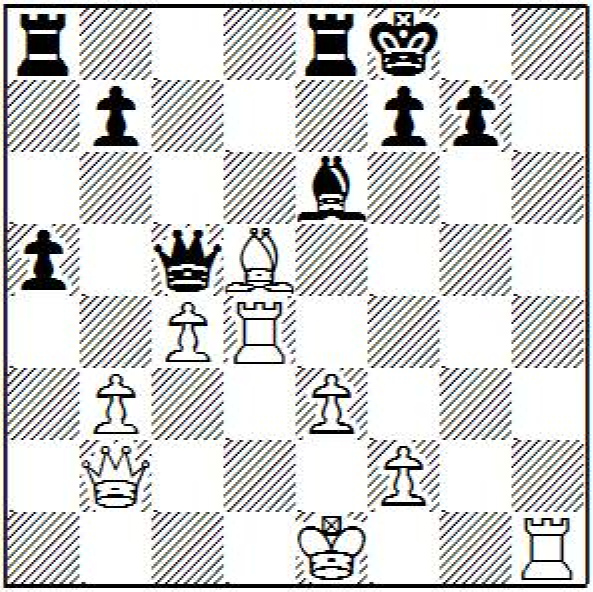
Threatening 27 Qa3+ Kg8 28 Bh7+ Kh8 29 Rdh4.

26 ... Qc5

Interesting, in my opinion, was 26 ... Ke7!?, which again has not been pointed out by anyone. After 27 Bd5! (27 Qa3+ Kf6) 27 ... Bxd5 28 Rxd5 f6 29 Qd4 Black still has a sorry position, but at least there does not appear to be a forced win.

27 Bd5!

'With a new dangerous threat: 28 Bxe6 fxe6 (28 ... Rxe6? 29 Rh8+) 29 Rf4+ Kg8 30 Qc2.' (Panov)



27 ... Ra6!

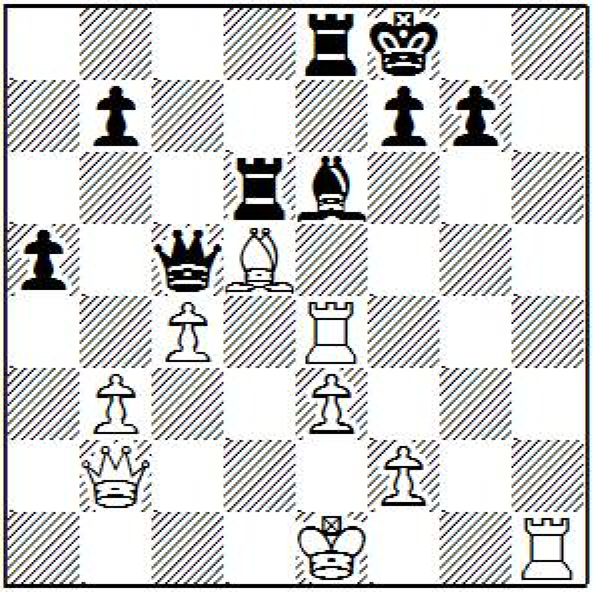
A tenacious defence, although a question mark was attached to this move! 'In a difficult position, aggravated by time-trouble, Black, who up till now had defended very tenaciously, makes an irreparable mistake. 27 ... Rad8 was better, when White would have had to go into a queen ending with an extra pawn: 28 Bxe6! Rxd4 29 Rh8+ Ke7 30 Rxe8+ Kxe8 31 Bxf7+ Kxf7 32 exd4 Qb4+ 33 Kd1 a4 34 Kc2.’ (Panov) But in the computer era the problem is solved far more dramatically and simply: 29 Qxd4! Qxd4 (also bad is 29 ... Qb4+ 30 Ke2 fxe6 31 Rh8+ Kf7 32 Qf4+ Ke7 33 Qc7+) 30 Rh8+ Ke7 31 Rxe8+ Kxe8 32 Bxf7+! Kxf7 33 exd4 with a won pawn ending.

And if 27 ... Qb4+ 28 Ke2 Ra6 the computer finds a no less interesting geometrical win: 29 Bxe6 Raxe6 30 Rd5! f6 31 Rb5 Qe7 32 Qd2 b6 33 Rxb6!! (very pretty!) 33 ... Rxb6 34 Rh8+ Kf7 35 Qd5+ Qe6 36 Qh5+.

28 Re4! (with the threat of Rh8+) **28 ... Rd6?**

But this is indeed the consequence of time-trouble. Also bad is 28 ... g6? 29 Rh8+ Ke7 30 Bxe6 Rxe6 31 Rxe6+ fxe6 32 Rh7+ Kd6 33 Qd2+ Ke5 34 Qc3+ Ke4 35 Rf7 winning.

‘28 ... Kg8 fails to 29 Rg1.’ (Panov) However, this was the best defence, since after 29 ... Qf8! there appears to be no direct win for White: 30 Bxb7 Rb6 31 Bd5 Reb8 32 Bxe6 Rxb3 33 Bxf7+ Qxf7 34 Re8+! Rxe8 35 Qxb3 with an advantage that still has to be converted. Therefore the computer’s recommendation, rather a complicated one for a practical game, comes into consideration: 29 f4!? (inaccurate is 29 Reh4 f6!) 29 ... Qb4+ 30 Kf1, for example: 30 ... f5 31 Rg1 Qf8 32 Rxe6 Raxe6 33 Qe5 Qf7 34 Bxe6 Rxe6 35 Rxg7+, or 30 ... Rd6 31 Qh2 Kf8 32 Qh8+ Ke7 33 Qxg7 Kd8 34 Bxe6 fxe6 35 Rd4 Rxd4 36 Qxd4+ Kc8 37 Rh5 and wins.



29 Rh7! (the remainder is now simple) **29 ... Ke7**

There is nothing better: 29 ... g6 30 Qg7+ Ke7 31 Rxe6+, or 29 ... f6 30 Rh8+; 29 ... Qb4+ 30 Ke2 Rxd5 31 Qxg7+ Ke7 32 Qxf7+ Kd8 33 Qc7 mate.

30 Qxg7 Kd8 31 Bxe6 fxe6 (31 ... Rdxe6 32 Qxf7) **32 Qxb7 Qb4+ 33 Qxb4 axb4 34 c5 Rc6 35 Rxb4 Rxc5 36 Ra7 1-0**

Hinting at 36 ... Rc8? 37 Rd4 – an epaulette mate! Here Black resigned.

The champion had clearly warmed up! After this excellent win Capablanca took the lead and he possibly thought that later too everything would go so smoothly: draws with Black, wins with White ...

However, in the ninth game a slight disappointment awaited him: from the opening he would have seized the initiative, but with a series of precise moves Alekhine brilliantly solved some rather difficult problems. This was the first symptom of the imminent turning-point. Alekhine’s wins in the 11th and 12th games (*Game Nos.125 and 126*) took him into the lead – 3-2, and undermined Capablanca’s confidence in his ultimate success. ‘I am not doing as well as I expected,’ he wrote at that time to a friend in New York. ‘I believe, however, that should another match be arranged in New York, for, say, the beginning of 1929, I could do much better ... Should the match here end in a draw, I suggest that the next match be limited to twenty games ... '

These impressive wins influenced the evaluation of the further course of the match: in chess literature the opinion was expressed that Alekhine, despite isolated failures, confidently 'sailed' to the champion's title – especially since he won the 21st game in splendid style, increasing his lead to 4-2.

But to me the picture seems somewhat different. After his defeats in the 11th and 12th games Capablanca came down to earth, gathered his strength and began making draws, in order to gradually come to, get back to his best and begin a new offensive (this resembles Lasker's strategy in the 1921 match: the main thing being to hold on!).

After four successive draws he had completely calmed down, but the 17th game again upset him. After letting slip an enormous positional advantage, he angrily said: 'If I can't win *such* a game, I will also not win the match ... ' With two respite draws he regained his calm, but then came the 20th game, in which he seized the initiative, won the exchange and ... barely escaped with a draw (*Game No.127*). Alekhine was playing very strongly! I think that Capablanca was shocked, at any event he played very badly in the 21st game, whereas Alekhine's play was again very strong (*Game No.128*).

'By inertia' Capa also nearly lost the 22nd game. Alekhine conducted it with great verve, but in a difficult endgame he missed a win (at the end the Cuban defended brilliantly – *Game No.129*). And here, it seems to me, a new phase of the match began: the challenger faded, whereas the champion, realising that the loss of his title was now a reality, revived and began playing with increasing power. After four relatively quiet draws the most interesting events began.

In the next five games Capablanca held the initiative. The fact that Alekhine capitulated only once appears simply miraculous! The main talking-point was the Cuban's blunder in the completely won 27th game.

Game 105

J.R.Capablanca-A.Alekhine

World Championship Match, Buenos Aires 1927, 27th game

Queen's Gambit D65

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Nbd7 5 e3 Be7 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Rc1 (another opening *tabiya* of this match) **7 ... a6!?** (Capa himself upheld 7 ... c6) **8 cxd5**

The classic Carlsbad Variation. From games 13-21 Capablanca played 8 a3 (*Game No.128*).

8 ... exd5 9 Bd3 c6 10 Qc2!

The 23rd game went 10 0-0 Ne8 11 Bxe7 Qxe7 12 e4?! dxe4 13 Nxe4 Ndf6 14 Qc2 Nxe4 15 Bxe4 Nf6 16 Bf5 Bxf5 17 Qxf5 Rad8 18 Rfe1 Qb4 19 Qc2 Rfe8 with excellent play for Black.

10 ... h6

10 ... Re8 11 0-0 Nf8 is more solid, for example: 12 Rfe1 (12 Rb1 and b2-b4 is also of current interest) 12 ... Be6 13 Na4 N6d7 14 Bxe7 Qxe7 15 Nc5 Nxc5 16 Qxc5 Qc7 17 b4 (25th game), and here Alekhine recommended 17 ... Rad8! 18 Ne5 Nd7 or 18 Nd2 Bg4 and ... Bh5-g6 with equal chances in each instance.

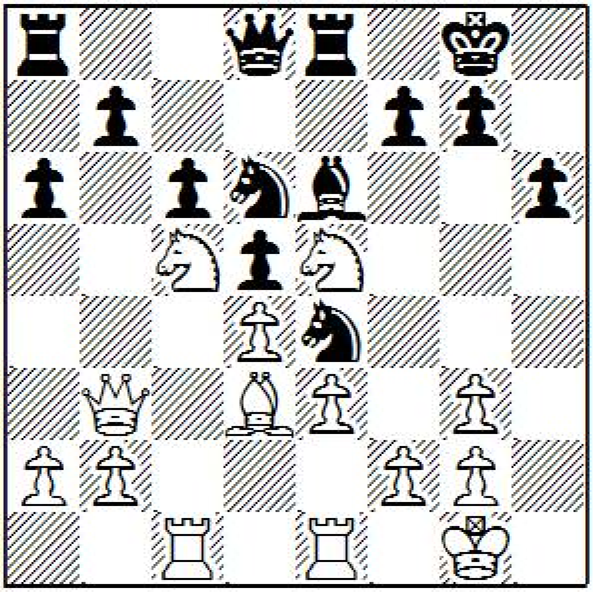
11 Bh4 Ne8

After 11 ... Re8 the inclusion of ... h7-h6 merely makes it harder for Black to equalise.

12 Bg3 Bd6 13 0-0 Bxg3 14 hxg3 Nd6 15 Na4!

The weakness of the opponent's queenside gives White a small but enduring positional advantage.

15 ... Re8 16 Rfe1 Nf6?! (according to Alekhine, 16 ... Nf8 was better, leaving the f6- square free for the queen) **17 Ne5 Nfe4 18 Qb3! Be6 19 Nc5!**



19 ... Nxc5?

‘A gross error; 19 ... Qf6! was correct.’ (Alekhine) After 20 Bxe4 dxe4 21 Nxe6 (21 Qb6 Re7) 21 ... Qxe6 22 Qxe6 Rxe6 23 Nd7! Rd8 24 Nb6 this would have left Black with an inferior but defensible endgame.

20 dxc5 Nb5 21 a4 Nc7

With an elementary trap: 22 Qxb7?? Bc8!

22 Bb1!

An accurate and timely decision. ‘Capablanca unexpectedly switches to an attack on Black’s weakened kingside. The coordination of White’s pieces is as good as that of Black’s is bad!’ (Panov)

22 ... Bc8

Sadly necessary: after 22 ... Qf6? a pawn is lost: 23 Qxb7! Qxe5 24 f4 Qf6 25 Qxc7.

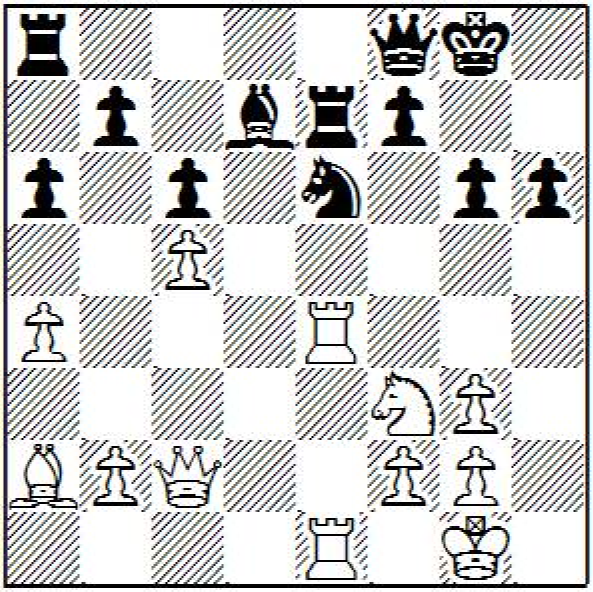
23 Nf3 Ne6 24 e4!

White’s advantage becomes threatening: by opening the position, he quickly mobilises all his forces for the concluding assault.

24 ... dxe4 (in the event of 24 ... d4 this pawn would not have survived for long) **25 Rxe4 Re7?!**

25 ... Nc7 and ... Nd5 was more tenacious.

26 Rce1 Bd7 (but not 26 ... Nxc5?? 27 Rxe7 Nxb3 28 Re8+ and mate) **27 Qc2 g6 28 Ba2! Qf8**



29 Ne5! (the decisive blow: Black’s defences begin to crack) **29 ... Qg7**

Or 29 ... Be8 30 Nxg6!

30 Nxd7 Rxd7 31 Bxe6 fxe6 32 Rg4

After gaining a completely winning position and anticipating Black’s inevitable capitulation, Capa loses the thread a little. In Soultanbéieff’s opinion, 32 Rxe6 Kh7 33 Rd6! was more convincing, for example: 33 ... Rad8 34 Ree6 Rxd6 35 cxd6 Rd7 36 Qe4 winning.

32 ... Kh7 33 Rxe6 Rg8 34 Qe4!

‘The win of the queen and a pawn for two rooks by 34 Rxg6 would have greatly prolonged the game.’ (Panov) Now it would appear that nothing can stop the efficient world champion, who has completely destroyed the challenger’s position. But in battles at the top one must always be prepared for miracles, and until the opponent stops the clocks, the game is not over ...

34 ... Rf7 35 f4!

With the terrible threat of 36 f5! Rxf5 37 Rgxg6 Qxg6 38 Rxg6 Kxg6 39 g4 and wins.

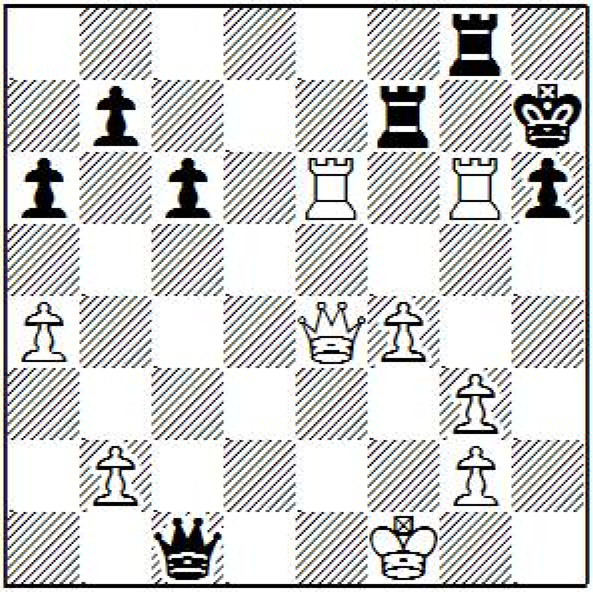
35 ... Qf8

‘With a last faint hope that Capablanca will fall into a trap ... 35 ... Rf6 36 Re7 Rf7 37 Rxg6! was also bad.’ (Panov)

36 Rgxg6

In a calm frame of mind Capa would most probably have chosen a longer, but safer path to his goal – 36 b4, defending the c5-pawn. Then there would not have been anything to devise, and the champion would have ‘automatically’ converted his advantage into a win. Thus after, say, 36 ... Rf5 37 Rgxg6! Rxg6 38 Rxg6 Kxg6 39 g4 White gains a won pawn ending: 39 ... h5 40 Qxf5+ Qxf5 41 gxf5+ Kxf5 42 g3 h4 43 Kf2 Kg4 44 gxh4 Kxf4 45 h5 Kg5 46 Ke3 Kxh5 47 Kf4 with the triumphal march of the king to c7.

36 ... Qxc5+ 37 Kf1 (but not 37 Kh2?? Qh5+) **37 ... Qc1+**



38 Kf2??

‘Throwing away the win, which had been achieved by truly brilliant play!’ (Panov) ‘When he captured on g6 on move 36, Capablanca simply overlooked the check on c5. This oversight, which in itself did not matter, nonetheless made him so nervous that straight afterwards, without thinking about it, he made the decisive error ... ’ (Alekhine)

Moving one square to the left – 38 Ke2! could have changed the course (and even the outcome) of the match: after 38 ... Qxb2+ 39 Kf3 Qb3+ (39 ... Qc3+ 40 Kg4) 40 Kf2! (avoiding the trap 40 Kg4?? Qxe6+! 41 Qxe6 Rxg6+) 40 ... Qb2+ 41 Kg1 Qc1+ 42 Kh2 the king would have found shelter and Black would have had to resign.

38 ... Qd2+! ½-½

Perpetual check cannot be avoided: 39 Kg1 (39 Kf3 Qd1+) 39 ... Qd1+ 40 Kf2 (40 Kh2?? Qh5+) 40 ... Qd2+.

Here, in my view, what told was not only extreme fatigue with a ‘mental black-out’ (as one of the commentators expressed it), but also Capablanca’s inveterate habit of trying to convert an advantage while avoiding the calculation of any variations that were in the least complicated (remember his match with Lasker!).

The things that were written about this game! It was called both the decisive one in the match, and a fatal one for the champion ... ‘The consequences of Capablanca’s tragic mistake predetermined the outcome of the entire match.’ (Panov) But in my opinion, although Capa was in a state of shock, his main mistake was still to come. And for the moment he was continuing to press his opponent with all his remaining strength.

In the 28th game, where a sharp, multi-piece endgame was reached, Alekhine ran short of time and ended up in a critical position: White inevitably lost a pawn. In an effort to save the game, he thought over his sealed move for 1 hour 50 minutes (a record for the match!) and on the resumption he twice more found the only moves ... And here, after thinking for 40 minutes, Capablanca unexpectedly offered a draw!

The 29th game was no less dramatic. One version has it that Alekhine thoroughly exhausted his opponent by his tenacious defence in a very difficult position. He did indeed defend brilliantly, but he nevertheless lost the game ...

Game 106

J.R.Capablanca-A.Alekhine

World Championship Match, Buenos Aires 1927, 29th game

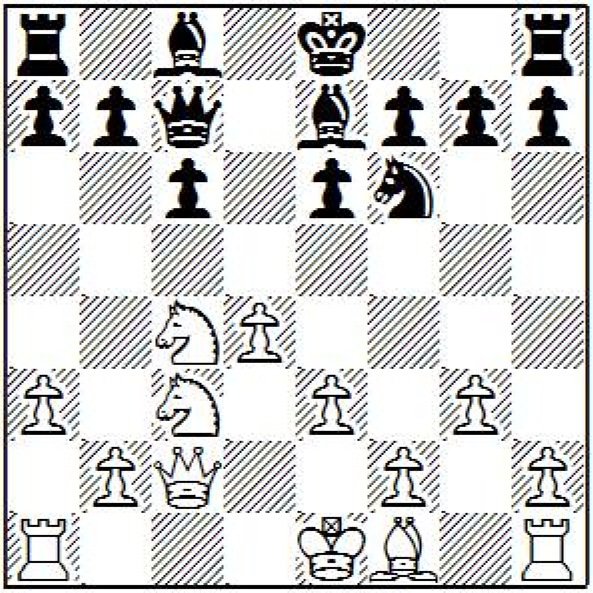
Queen’s Gambit D52

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Nbd7 5 e3 c6 6 Nf3 Qa5 7 Nd2 Bb4 8 Qc2 dxc4

Apparently the challenger was not inspired by 8 ... 0-0 9 Bh4!? (*Game No.104*).

9 Bxf6 Nxf6 10 Nxc4 Qc7 11 a3 (11 g3!?) **11 ... Be7 12 g3!?**

A new move! In the 11th game 12 Be2 was played (*Game No.125*).



12 ... 0-0

12 ... c5!? comes into consideration, and if 13 Nb5 – 13 ... Qc6! (more passive is 13 ... Qb8 14 dxc5 Bxc5 15 Rd1! 0-0 16 Bg2 with some advantage) 14 Ne5 Qxh1 15 Nc7+ Kf8 16 Nxa8 b6, seizing the initiative. While after 13 Bg2 (13 dxc5 Bxc5 14 b4 Be7 15 Nb5 Qb8 16 Ncd6+ Bxd6 17 Qxc8+ Qxc8 18 Nxd6+ Ke7 19 Nxc8+ Raxc8 is level) 13 ... Bd7 14 Ne5 cxd4 15 exd4 0-0 Black has no reason to complain (Levenfish-Chistyakov, Leningrad 1939).

13 Bg2 Bd7

Capablanca recommended 13 ... b6?, but after 14 Ne5! Bb7 15 Nb5 Qc8 16 Nxc6 Black loses a pawn.

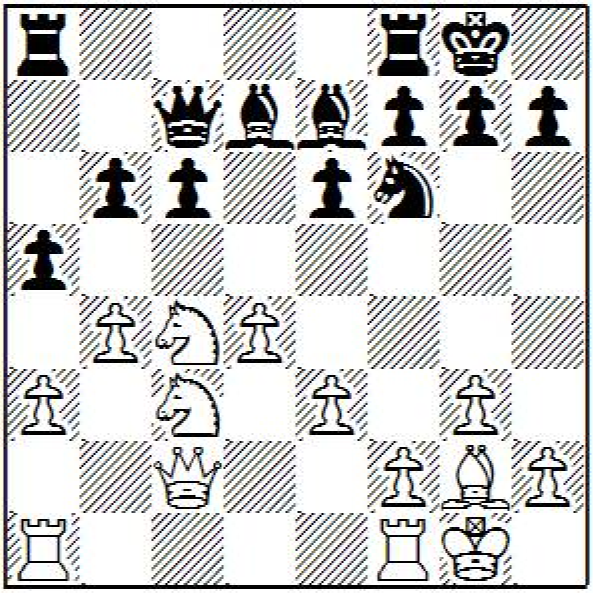
14 b4! (14 0-0 c5!) **14 ... b6**

White has the advantage after 14 ... Nd5 15 0-0 Nxc3 16 Qxc3 Rfd8 (Alekhine-Bogoljubow, Bad Nauheim 1936) 17 Rfc1! and Rab1.

15 0-0 a5?!

‘A careless move, which I had already rejected in the 11th game because of very similar variations.’ (Alekhine) Capablanca’s suggestion 15

... Rab8 16 Rfb1 c5?! 17 dxc5 bxc5 18 b5! is of instructional value. Modern theory recommends 15 ... Rac8 (followed by ... Rfd8 and ... Be8), although even here after 16 Rfc1 Rfd8 17 Rab1 White has a small but enduring advantage.



16 Ne5!

‘An energetic reply.’ (Kotov) ‘The only move by which White firmly maintains the advantage.’ (Panov) And indeed, weaker is 16 bxa5 (16 b5? Rac8!; 16 Rab1? axb4 17 axb4 Ra7!; 16 Qb3? axb4 17 axb4 Nd5!) 16 ... b5! 17 Ne5 Rxa5 18 a4! bxa4! 19 Nxa4 c5 20 Nxd7 Nxd7 with equality.

16 ... axb4 17 axb4

17 Nb5!?, a move that was not mentioned by anyone, in interesting, for example: 17 ... Qc8 18 Nxd7 Qxd7 19 Bxc6 Rac8 20 Rac1 Qd8 21 axb4 Bxb4 22 Qb3 with definite pressure.

17 ... Rxa1

17 ... Bxb4?! was bad because of 18 Nb5! Qc8 (or 18 ... Qb7 19 Nxd7 Qxd7 20 Bxc6 Rac8 21 Rfc1) 19 Na7! (Becker suggested 19 Rxa8 Qxa8 20 Bxc6! Bxc6 21 Nxc6 Ba5 22 Ra1, but after 20 ... Rc8! 21 Nxd7 Qxc6 22 Nxf6+ gxf6 23 Qe2 Qe4 all is not clear) 19 ... Qe8 20 Nxd7 Nxd7 21 Bxc6 Rd8 22 Rfb1 with an overwhelming advantage.

18 Rxa1 Rc8!

18 ... Bxb4? was again bad: 19 Nb5 Qc8 20 Bxc6! (Capablanca) 20 ... Bxc6 21 Nxc6 Qd7 22 Ra7 Qd5 23 Nc7 Qd6 24 Qc4 wins, while 18 ... c5?! 19 Nxd7 Qxd7 20 dxc5 bxc5 21 b5 gives White a powerful passed pawn.

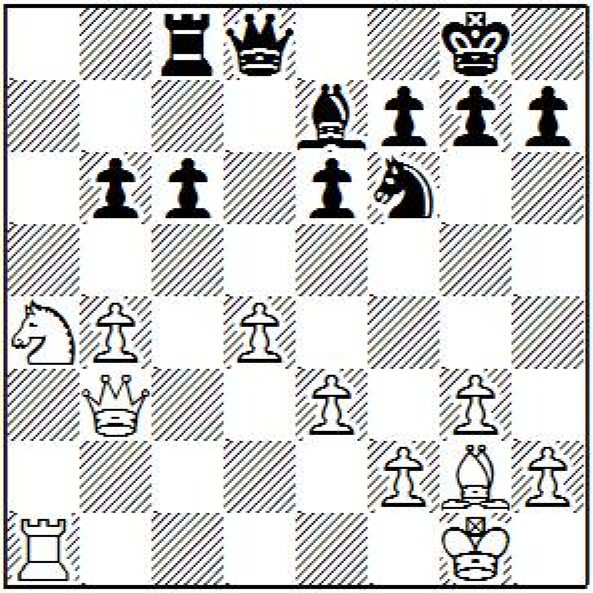
19 Nxd7 Qxd7?!

'Capablanca pointed out that 19 ... Nxd7, defending the b6-pawn, was better, although after 20 Qb3 White would still have retained the advantage.' (Panov) Even so, Black's position would have been quite tolerable.

20 Na4!

The start of some subtle manoeuvres aimed at destroying the opponent's queenside.

20 ... Qd8 (according to Kotov, better chances of a defence were offered by 20 ... Bd8 21 Rc1 Nd5 22 Bxd5 exd5 23 b5 c5 24 dxc5 Qxb5) **21 Qb3!** (of course, not 21 Bxc6? Bxb4 equalising)



21 ... Nd5?!

21 ... c5? 22 bxc5 bxc5 23 dxc5 Bxc5 24 Bb7! was bad for Black, but Capablanca's recommendation of 21 ... b5! 22 Nc5 Bxc5 23 bxc5 Ra8 (if 23 ... Nd5, then 24 Ra6) was stronger. According to Panov, this loses to 24 Rxa8 Qxa8 25 Qxb5 cxb5 26 Bxa8 b4 27 Bf3 b3 28 Bd1 b2 29 Bc2 Kf8 30 e4 'and the white king approaches the b2-pawn,' but in my opinion, after 30

... Ke7 31 Kf1 Kd7 32 Ke2 Kc6 33 f4 (33 Kd2 e5!) 33 ... Kb5 34 Kd3 Kb4 35 Bb1 Ne8 things are closer to a draw.

22 b5! cxb5?!

Again a dubious move, leading to the loss of the b6-pawn and indeed to an unpleasant position. Capablanca, and after him Panov and Kotov, condemn 22 ... c5 because of 23 dxc5 bxc5 (23 ... Bxc5? 24 Rd1!) 24 Qc4. But it seems to me that after 24 ... Qa5 25 Rb1 Rb8 26 h4 Nb4 27 Nc3 Bf6 28 Bf1 White's advantage is not so great and that Black can still resist.

23 Qxb5 Ra8

The commentators attached an exclamation mark to this move and called it 'a very resourceful defence.' And indeed 23 ... Rb8?! was more passive: 24 Bxd5 Qxd5 25 Qxd5 exd5 26 Rb1 b5 (26 ... Bd8 27 Rb5) 27 Nc3 b4 28 Nxd5 Bd6 29 Rb3 and e3-e4-e5 (Becker). But I think that better chances of a draw were offered by going into an ending with opposite-coloured bishops: 23 ... Nc3!? 24 Qxb6 (the widely recommended variation 24 Nxc3 Rxc3 25 Bc6 is no better in view of 25 ... Ba3!) 24 ... Nxa4 25 Qxd8+ Bxd8 26 Rxa4 Rc1+ 27 Bf1 Kf8.

Now, however, White wins a pawn while retaining his queen and knight, reaching what is probably a technically won position.

24 Rc1! (but not 24 Rb1? Rxa4! 25 Qxa4 Nc3 equalising) **24 ... Ra5 25 Qc6 Ba3**

Weak is 25 ... b5?! 26 Bxd5! (26 Qb7 Bf8) 26 ... exd5 27 Nc5 Qa8 28 Qd7 and totally bad is 25 ... Nb4? 26 Qb7! Bf8 27 Nxb6 Rb5 28 Rc8 Qd6 (28 ... Qxb6 29 Qe7) 29 Nc4 winning.

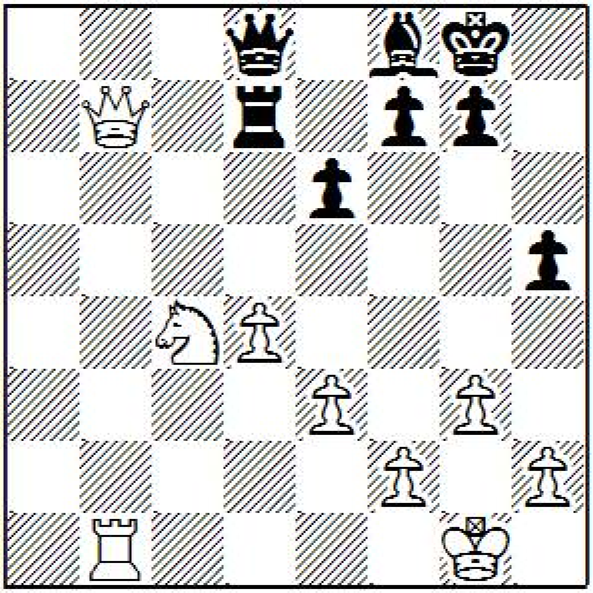
26 Rb1 Bf8

Threatening ... Rxa4. Neither 26 ... Rxa4? 27 Qxa4 Nc3 28 Qxa3 Nxb1 29 Qb2 nor 26 ... b5? 27 Nc5 Bxc5 28 dxc5 Ne7 29 Qb6 will do.

27 Bxd5 Rxd5 28 Nxb6

'After the opponent's exemplary exploitation of the weaknesses, Black has lost a pawn.' (Alekhine) But not yet the game ...

28 ... Rd6 29 Qb7 h5 (generally speaking, 29 ... h6 is more solid) **30 Nc4 Rd7**



31 Qe4

31 Qf3!? Rc7 32 Ne5 is also interesting. It is pointless to try and exhaust the given position by variations – it seems to me that objectively it is closer to a loss for Black than to a draw. With the given pawn formation, any endgame is difficult: queen, rook, or even knight against bishop (a similar ending, but with four pawns against three, was won by White, for example, in the game Khalifman-Barua, Las Vegas 2nd matchgame 1999).

31 ... Rc7 32 Ne5 Qc8 33 Kg2 Bd6 34 Ra1 Rb7

But not 34 ... Qb7? 35 Ra8+ Bf8 36 Qxb7 Rxb7 37 Rd8! and Nd7 and wins.

35 Nd3 g6 36 Ra6 Bf8 37 Rc6 (with the idea of 38 Nc5 Bxc5 39 dxc5) **37 ... Rc7! 38 Rxc7**

‘Capablanca incorrectly suggests that 38 Ne5 would have won. Then with 38 ... Qb7 39 Qf3 Bg7 Black would have achieved a position very similar to that which occurred in the game.’ (Alekhine)

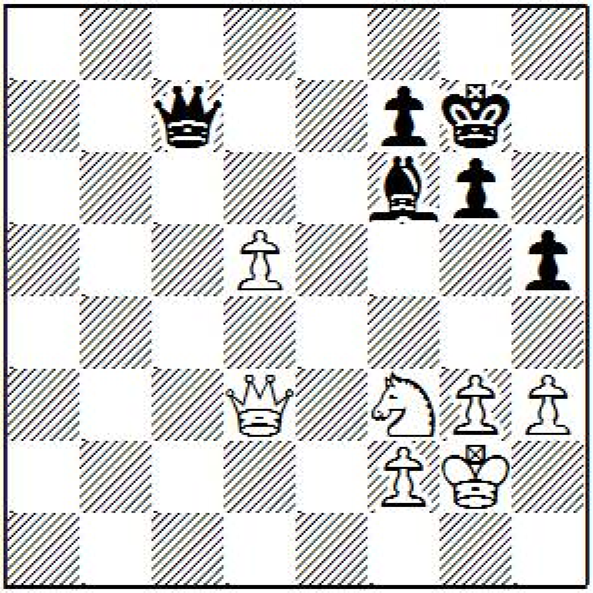
38 ... Qxc7 39 Ne5 Bg7 (defending against Nxg6) **40 Qa8+ Kh7 41 Nf3 Bf6**

And now 42 Ng5+ Kh6 43 h4 and Qg8! was threatened.

42 Qa6 (if 42 Qf8, then 42 ... Qe7) **42 ... Kg7 43 Qd3**

White has chosen the most straightforward plan: the creation of a passed pawn on the d-file. But the paradoxical thing is that in the process his advantage gradually evaporates! Perhaps he shouldn’t have exchanged rooks and been in a hurry to advance his pawns ...

43 ... Qb7 44 e4 Qc6 45 h3 Qc7 46 d5 (according to Alekhine, there is no time for 46 Nd2 in view of 46 ... h4!) **46 ... exd5 47 exd5**



47 ... Qc3!

This move, which was underestimated by the champion, delighted the commentators: the challenger had precisely calculated that without the queens Black should gain a draw, whereas after 47 ... Qd6 48 Qc4 Qf8 49 Nd4 his position could have become critical.

48 Qxc3

‘Also after 48 Qe4 Qc5! a win for White would hardly have been possible.’ (Alekhine) Better, perhaps, was 48 Qd1!? Qc7 49 d6 Qc6 50 d7 Bd8 51 Qd4+ Kg8, although even here it is hard to believe that White can win.

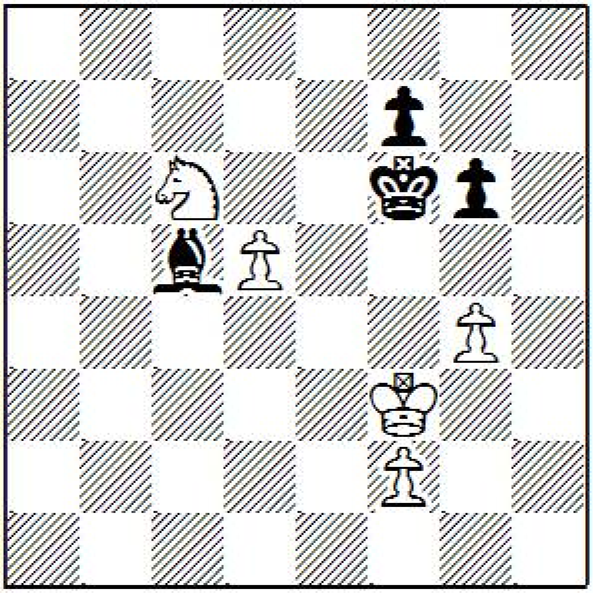
48 ... Bxc3 49 Kf1! (49 Ng5 f5!) **49 ... Kf6 50 Ke2 Bb4! 51 Nd4!**

‘Capablanca plays the endgame with his typical accuracy, playing his knight to the strong square c6. If 51 Kd3 there would have followed 51 ... Bc5 52 Nd4 Ke5.’ (Kotov)

51 ... Bc5 (only not 51 ... Ke5?? 52 Nc6+) **52 Nc6 Kf5! 53 Kf3**

Or 53 f3 Bd6 54 g4+ hxg4 55 hxg4+ Kf4 drawing.

53 ... Kf6! 54 g4!? (the last chance) **54 ... hxg4+ 55 hxg4**



55 ... Kg5??

‘A blunder, which nullifies all Black’s fine preceding work.’ (Kotov) ‘Tired by his laborious, exhausting defence against the endgame virtuoso, Alekhine makes two mistakes, one after another, and unexpectedly loses.’ (Panov)

As all the commentators pointed out, a simple draw would have been given by 55 ... Bd6! (Alekhine also gave 55 ... Bb6!? with a draw), for example: 56 Ke4 Kg5! 57 Ne5 (57 f3 f5+ 58 gxf5 gxf5+ 59 Ke3 Bc5+) 57 ... f5+ 58 gxf5 gxf5+ 59 Kd4 Kf4, 56 Nd8 Bc7 57 g5+ Kxg5 58 Nxf7+ Kf6 59 d6 Bb6, or 56 Ke2 Kg5 57 Nd8 Bc7 58 Nxf7+ (58 Nb7 Bb6 59 f3 f5) 58 ... Kf6 59 d6 Bb6 60 Nh8 g5.

56 Ne5! Bd4?!

Capitulation. ‘When I made the incorrect king move, which, as it seemed to me, was the easiest way to draw after 56 ... f5, I simply overlooked the study-like continuation 57 d6! fxg4+ 58 Kg2!’ (Alekhine) Followed by 58 ... Kf5 59 d7 Be7 60 Nc6 winning.

Also bad was 56 ... Kf6? 57 Nd7+ or 56 ... f6? 57 Nf7+ followed by the advance of the d-pawn. ‘Strangely enough, even two pawns down Black would have retained drawing chances, had he played 56 ... Ba3! 57 Nxf7+ Kf6 and 58 ... Ke5.’ (Panov) This is indeed more tenacious, although after 57 d6! Kf6 58 d7 Ke7 59 Nxf7 Kxd7 60 Ne5+ White would also have won.

57 Nxf7+ Kf6 58 Nd8! Bb6 (58 ... Ke5? 59 Nc6+) **59 Nc6 Bc5 60 Kf4!**

An elegant pawn sacrifice, which forces the win. 60 Kg3 Bd6+ 61 f4? g5 or 60 Ke2 Kg5 61 f3 Kf4 was inaccurate.

60 ... Bxf2 (60 ... g5+ 61 Kf3, then Ke2, f2-f3, Kd3-c4-b5-a6-b7 etc.) **61 g5+ Kf7 62 Ne5+ Ke7**

Like a move earlier, 62 ... Kg7 loses to 63 d6.

63 Nxg6+ Kd6 64 Ke4 Bg3 65 Nf4 Ke7 66 Ke5 Be1 67 d6+ Kd7 68 g6 Bb4 69 Kd5 (but not 69 g7? Bc3+) **69 ... Ke8 70 d7+! 1-0**

By accurately exploiting his opponent's mistake, Capa reduced the deficit to 3-4. It is true that the game might have left an unpleasant aftertaste: from a practically winning position he had reached one that was drawn. In one of the match books there is an original passage on this theme (which Kotov liked to quote): 'Capablanca conducted the entire game in his best style and nevertheless he won it accidentally.' One great expert on chess commented: 'After his undeserved draw in the 27th game I thought that Capablanca might be able to save the match, but after his win in the 29th game I finally saw that things were lost for him.'

However, a careful study of the next few games shows that the opinion of the 'expert' was a long way from reality. The match initiative was still with the Cuban! In the 30th game he improved Black's play compared with the 28th and confidently gained a draw. And in the 31st he was not afraid to go in for double-edged play, allowing his opponent serious counter-chances. But it only needed Black to stumble – and Capablanca found a way to take play into an endgame where he was a pawn up with excellent winning chances.

Game 107

J.R.Capablanca-A.Alekhine

World Championship Match, Buenos Aires 1927, 31st game

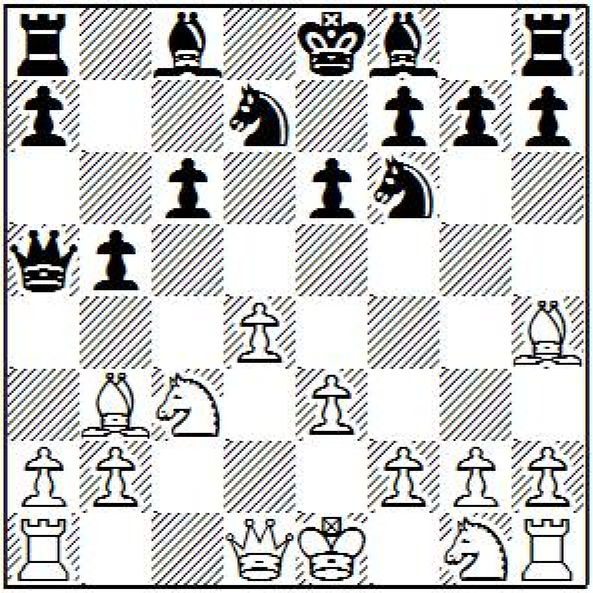
Queen's Gambit D51

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Nbd7 5 e3 c6 6 Bd3

A harmless deviation from the Cambridge Springs. In the fifth game Capa did this by 6 a3 Be7 7 Nf3, and in the ninth – 6 Qc2 Qa5 7 cxd5 Nxd5 8 e4 Nxc3 9 Bd2, but unsuccessfully (9 ... Qa4! 10 Qxc3 a5! 11 Nf3 Bb4 with equality). In the 32nd game Alekhine preferred 6 cxd5 exd5 7 Bd3, and in the 34th he reverted to 6 a3 (*Game No.130*).

6 ... Qa5! 7 Bh4 dxc4 (7 ... Bb4 8 Ne2!) **8 Bxc4 b5 9 Bb3**

In the 33rd game after 9 Bd3 Bb7 (but not 9 ... b4?! 10 Qa4! Qxa4 11 Nxa4) 10 Nge2 a6 11 Bxf6 Nxf6 12 a3 Qb6 13 Ne4 Nxe4 (13 ... c5!? Alekhine) 14 Bxe4 c5 15 dxc5 Bxc5 16 Bxb7 Qxb7 17 0-0 0-0 18 Rc1 Rac8 a draw was agreed.

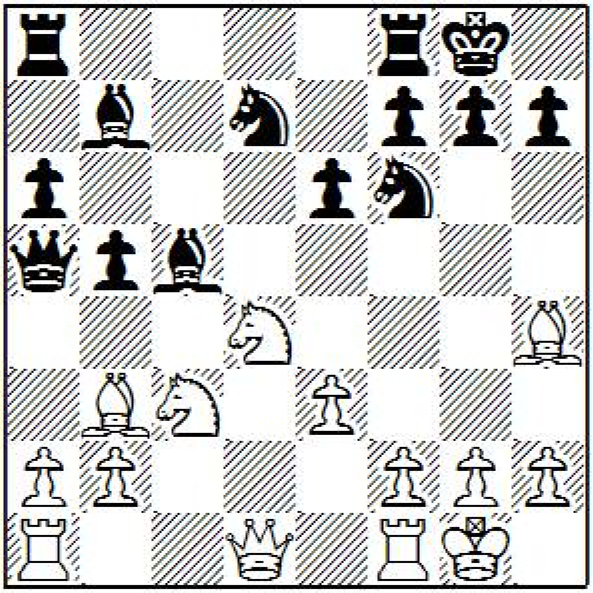


9 ... Bb7 10 Nf3 (10 Nge2?! c5!) **10 ... c5 11 dxc5 Bxc5**

Alekhine also suggested 11 ... Nxc5!? 12 Bxf6 gxf6.

12 0-0 0-0 13 Nd4 a6

‘The simplest way of defending against the threat of Nxe6 is to ignore it. Black could also maintain an equal game with 13 ... b4 14 Na4 Bd5.’ (Alekhine) 14 ... Be7!? will also do – 15 Nxe6? fxe6 16 Bxe6+ Kh8 17 Bxd7 g5 18 Bg3 Rad8 wins for Black.



14 Qe2

‘A somewhat risky move. I had rather expected 14 a3, by which White would have avoided both an isolated d-pawn, and the diversion of his queen’s knight to the edge of the board. And 14 Nxe6?! fxe6 15 Bxe6+ would only expose him to unnecessary dangers:

1) 15 ... Rf7 16 Qb3 Ne5 17 Rad1 Qc7 and if 18 Bg3, then 18 ... Qc6 and ... Nc4 with active piece play (*however, 17 Bxf6! gxf6 18 Nd5 is better, and so I would prefer 16..Raf8 17 Rad1 Qc7 – G. K.*);

2) 15 ... Kh8!? 16 Bxd7 Rad8 17 Bxf6 Rxf6 18 Qh5 Qc7 19 Bh3, and now either 19 ... Bd6 20 f4 Qb6, when the sacrificed material is bound to be won back, or 19 ... Rh6 20 Qe2 Qe5 with a very strong attack for Black (*true, after 21 Rad1 Rf8 things are not so clear as in the event of 20 ... b4! 21 Nd1 a5 22 Re1 Ba6 23 Qc2 Bd3 24 Qa4 g5 – G. K.*).

‘In the game I intended choosing the sharper second line.’ (Alekhine)

14 ... b4 15 Na4 Bxd4 16 exd4 Nd5

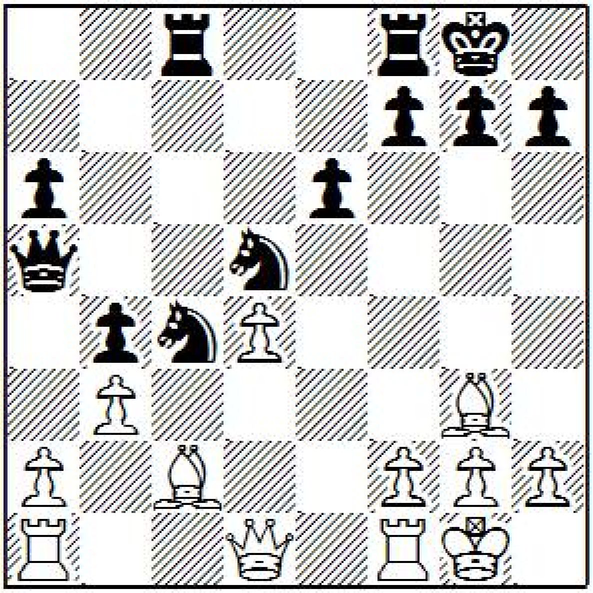
The immediate 16 ... Bc6?! is dubious in view of 17 Nc5 Nxc5 18 dxc5 Qxc5 19 Bxf6 gxf6 20 Rfc1! (but not 20 Rac1?! Bb5 21 Qg4+ Qg5).

17 Bg3 Bc6 18 Qc2 Bxa4 (18 ... Rac8 19 Nc5!) **19 Bxa4 Rac8 20 Qd1 N7b6 21 Bc2**

Or 21 Bb3 Qb5! with the threat of ... a6-a5-a4. It is now evident that White has not played the opening very well and his bishops are by no means superior to the black knights.

21 ... Nc4 22 b3?!

22 Qd3 f5 was unfavourable for White, but this new weakening could have cost Capablanca dearly.



22 ... Na3?!

A rare instance of Alekhine missing a tactical blow! This shows that he too was tired ... As he writes, 22 ... Nde3! suggests itself (but not 22 ... Nce3? 23 Bxh7+ Kxh7 24 Qh5+ Kg8 25 fxe3) – 23 fxe3 (or 23 Bxh7+ Kxh7 24 Qd3+ Qf5!) 23 ... Nxe3 24 Bxh7+ Kxh7 25 Qd3+ Nf5 26 Be5 (26 Be1 Kg8) 26 ... Kg8! with an obvious positional advantage, for example: 27 Qe4 (27 d5? Rc5!) 27 ... Qb6 28 g4 Ne7 29 Rac1 Rc3 etc.

23 Bd3 Nb5 24 Be5!

The situation has become sharper.

24 ... f5?!

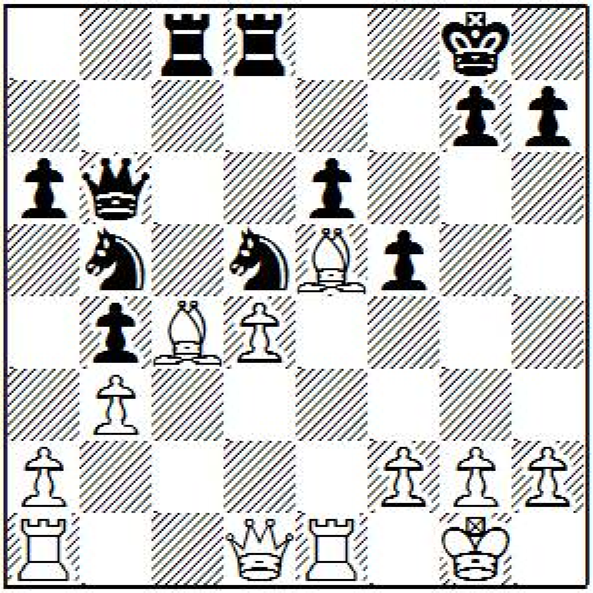
Possibly sensing his opponent’s nervous fatigue, the challenger decides to stake everything. The simple 24 ... f6! 25 Qh5 g6 26 Bxg6 hxg6 27 Qxg6+ Kh8 would have led to a draw (28 Qh6+). ‘The attempt to win with 28 f4 would fail to 28 ... Rc7 29 Bxc7 Qxc7 30 Rf3 Qh7! (Alekhine). And if 31 Rh3?, then 31 ... Qxh3 32 gxh3 Rg8 wins. But instead of 30 Rf3?, 30 f5! is very strong, for example: 30 ... Nxd4 31 fxe6 Nf4 32 Qh6+ Kg8 33

Rae1 Ndxe6 34 Re4 with an attack. Therefore if 28 f4 Black should force a draw by 28 ... fxe5! – 29 Qh6+ (29 Rf3? Nxf4) 29 ... Kg8.

25 Bc4 Rfd8?!

‘It is only after this move that Black gets into some difficulties. By the manoeuvre 25 ... Qd8! and ... Qd7 he could have safeguarded both his kingside and his centre, when a difficult game, with chances for both sides, would have arisen.’ (Alekhine) However, in my opinion, the position is now in White’s favour all the same: his bishops are gaining in strength! The position is a favourable modification for him of the well-known game Karpov-Korchnoi (Baguio 5th matchgame 1978).

26 Re1 Qb6



27 Qd2 Qb7?

‘This pawn sacrifice seemed to me to be sufficient for a draw, but in fact it is not fully correct. 27 ... Nbc3 would have given Black a perfectly defensible position, since after 28 a3! Ne4 White has no great advantage.’ (Alekhine) I don’t agree with this: firstly, there is a rather promising exchange sacrifice – 29 Rxe4!? fxe4 30 axb4 Ra8 31 Qg5 Rd7 32 b5 a5 33 Qg4, and secondly, White retains an enduring plus after 29 Qd3 a5 30 f3 Nd6 31 Bxd5 exd5 32 axb4 Qxb4 33 Re3 or 31 axb4 Nxc4 32 bxc4 Nxb4 33 Qb3.

I should add that 27 ... a5? would have led to the loss of a pawn: 28 Qg5 Rd7 29 Bxd5 exd5 30 Qxf5.

28 Bxd5 Qxd5 29 Qxb4 Rc2

But not 29 ... Nxd4? 30 Bxd4 Qxd4 31 Qxd4 Rxd4 32 Rxe6 winning.

30 Qe7!

White forces the exchange of queens, killing the opponent's temporary activity and beginning the conversion of his extra pawn.

30 ... Qd7 31 Qxd7 Rxd7 32 Kf1!

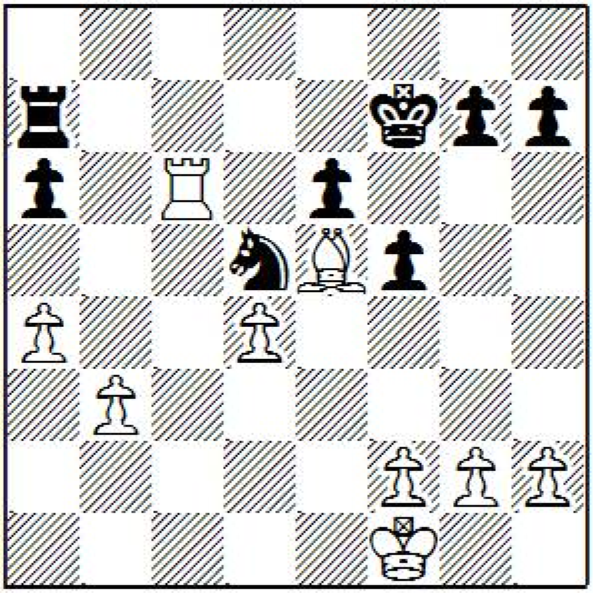
'This indirectly protects the pawn on d4 and threatens 33 Rec1. It would be much weaker to play 32 a4 Nxd4 33 Bxd4 Rxd4 34 Rxe6 Rdd2 35 Rf1 Rb2, when White's winning chances would be virtually negligible.' (Alekhine)

32 ... Kf7

Black preserves the d5-square for his knight. 'Even fewer chances (*or perhaps more?! – G. K.*) were offered by 32 ... Rd5 33 Rec1!, forcing 33 ... Rxc1+ 34 Rxc1 Nxd4 35 Bxd4 Rxd4 36 Rc6 a5 37 Ra6! Rd5 38 Rxe6 a4 39 Re1 followed by Rb1. Now 32 ... Nc3 was also inadequate, because of 33 Rac1 Rxc1 34 Rxc1 Nxa2 35 Rc6.' (Alekhine)

33 a4 Nc3 34 Rac1 Rxc1 35 Rxc1 Nd5 36 Rc6 Ra7

Of course, 36 ... Rb7? 37 Rxa6 Rxb3 38 Ra7+ was hopeless for Black.



Black has a strong knight, but White has a no less strong, dominant bishop, as well as an active rook and a sound extra pawn on the wing – a potential outside passed pawn. He only needs to take care that the black rook does not leap, like a jack-in-the-box, to b7 and then to b3. In short, White has a technically won endgame and it is probable that Capablanca had mentally chalked up the win already: he usually won such positions without thinking.

37 a5!?

Alekhine attaches a question mark to this move and recommends 37 h4, 'to disable the opposing kingside and then, with the necessary precautions, to bring the king to the queenside. This plan would have reduced Black's drawing chances to the minimum.'

The verdict of Levenfish and Romanovsky is no less severe: 'The pawn stood better at a4 than at a5, since now Black gains control of the b5-square, which is the key to the position. Correct was 37 Ke2 g5 38 h3 h5 39 Rc8 Rb7 40 Rb8 Rxb8 41 Bxb8 Ke7 42 Kd3 Kd7 43 Kc4 Kc6 44 b4! Nb6+ 45 Kb3 Kd5 46 b5 axb5 47 a5! Nd7 48 Be5 winning.'

However, in 1994(!) the Russian master Fridstein accomplished a complete revolution in the evaluation of this ending, beginning with a criticism of this last variation: 'The analysis was terminated too early: after 48 ... Nxe5! 49 dxe5 Kc5 the pawn ending is drawn! However, instead of 48 Be5? White wins by 48 Bc7! In turn, Black should not play 45 ... Kd5?! – after 45 ... g4 it is not at all easy to show that White has a win. But the main thing is that White has no reason to exchange his active rook for the opponent's passive rook! Instead of 39 Rc8?! it is not too late to transpose into a position from the game by 39 a5! The point is that the 'key to the position' is not the b5-square, but the b6-square!'

Perhaps 37 h4 was indeed simpler, since it would have deprived Black of any counterplay. However, the move in the game was not at all bad, as we shall see.

37 ... g5! (Alekhine's exclamation mark) **38 h3**

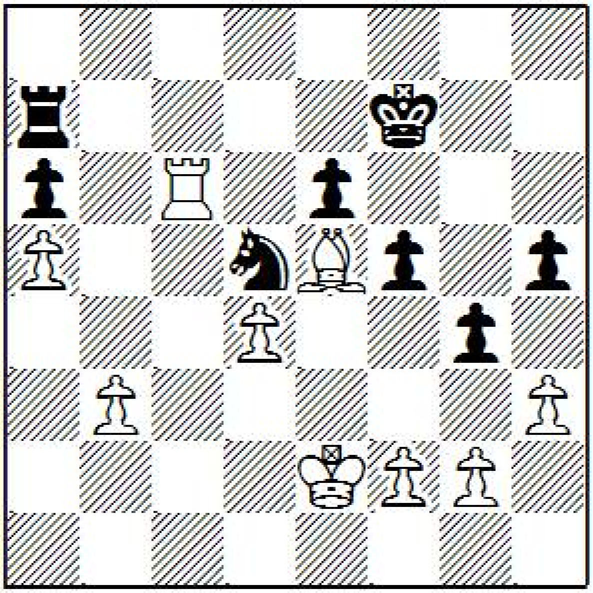
It is not clear whether 38 Ke2 was any better.

38 ... h5 39 Ke2 g4?

As it transpired many years later, this decisively weakens the f4-square. 'But what should Black play? If he waits, White will play his king to a3 and advance his b-pawn. This means that the most tenacious is 39 ... Rb7 40 Rxa6 Rxb3, initiating at least some kind of fight: 41 Ra7+ Kg6 42

a6 (here too 37.a5! came in useful!) 42 ... Ra3 (42 ... Rb2+ 43 Kd3 Rxf2? 44 Ra8! wins) 43 Rg7+ Kh6 44 a7 Nf4+ (or 44 ... Nc3+ 45 Kd2 Nb5 46 Rb7 Nxa7 47 Rb6) 45 Kd2 Nxg2 46 Re7 Nf4 47 Bxf4! gxf4 48 Rxe6+ Kg5 49 Re7 Kf6 50 Rb7 Ke6 51 Kc2 Kd5 52 Kb2 Ra6 53 Kb3 and White wins.' (Fridstein)

I think that this was the culminating point of the entire match.



40 Rc8??

The fatal last move before the time control ... 'A genuine tragedy for Capablanca! 40 Rb6!! would have given a straightforward win. Now 40 ... Nxb6 41 axb6 Rb7 loses by force: 42 Bc7 Ke7 43 Ke3! Kd7 44 Kf4 Rxc7 45 bxc7 Kxc7 46 Ke5 Kd7 47 h4 Ke7 (or 47 ... a5 48 d5 exd5 49 Kxd5) 48 f4 g3 49 d5. No better is 40 ... gxh3 (40 ... Ra8 41 h4; 40 ... Ke7 41 Rb8) 41 gxh3 Ra8 (*or 41 ... Nxb6 42 axb6 Rb7 43 Bc7 Ke8 44 Kf3 Ke7 45 Kf4 Kf6 46 Bd8+ Kg6 47 Ke5 Kf7 48 Kd6! – G. K.*) 42 h4 Rc8 43 Kd2 Rc3 44 Rxa6 Rxb3 45 Ra7+ Kg6 46 a6 Ra3 47 Rg7+ Kh6 48 a7.' (Fridstein)

Instead of this Capa unexpectedly removes the attack on the a6-pawn and releases the black rook.

40 ... Rb7! 41 Rb8

This essentially terminates the game. 'After the time wasted on his previous move, White could no longer have prevented Black from getting enough counterplay for a draw, for example: 41 hxg4 hxg4 42 Ra8 Rxb3 43

Ra7+ Kg6 44 Rxa6 f4! 45 Rxe6+ Kf5 46 Re8 (*46 Rd6 Ke4 – G. K.*), and now 46 ... Ra3, or indeed 46 ... Rb2+ or 46 ... f3+.' (Alekhine) I would prefer 46 ... Ra3 (46 ... Rb2+?! 47 Kd3 Rxf2 48 Bd6 Kg6 49 Re6+ Kf7 50 Re2 Rf1 51 Re5) 47 Bd6 f3+ 48 gxf3 gxf3+ 49 Kd2 Rxa5 50 Kd3 Nf6 51 Rf8 (or 51 Re3 Kg4 52 Be7 Nd5 53 Re4+ Kh3 54 Re5 Kg2) 51 ... Ke6 52 Bc5 Ng4 53 Rxf3 Ra2 54 Kc4 Rc2+ 55 Kb3 Rd2 56 Kc3 Ra2 drawing.

Here the game was adjourned and Black sealed

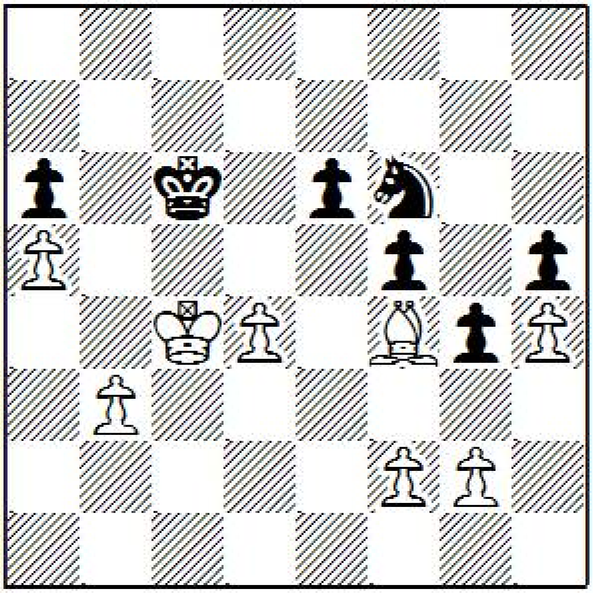
41 ... Rxb8

On the resumption there followed

42 Bxb8

and ... on White's proposal a draw was agreed. 'Of course, Black immediately plays 42 ... Ke7 43 Kd3 (43 f3 gxh3 44 gxh3 h4!) 43 ... Kd7 44 Kc4 Kc6.' (Alekhine)

However, as was discovered at the end of the 20th century by the Russian master Goldin, even in this seemingly arid desert White would have retained real winning chances after 45 h4! Nf6 46 Bf4.

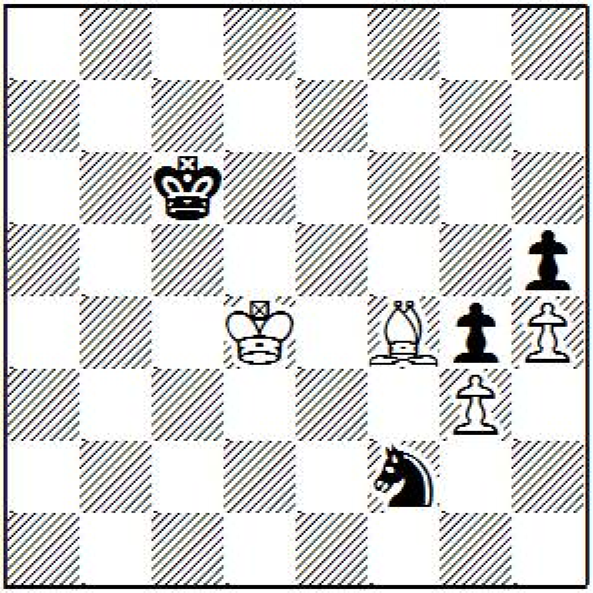


Analysis diagram

After fixing the h5-pawn, White wants to break through to it with his king with the help of d4-d5. The main line goes 46 ... Ne4 (inferior is 46 ... Nd5?! 47 g3 Nf6 48 d5+! Nxd5 49 Kd4 Nxf4 50 gxf4 Kd6 51 b4 winning) 47 b4 (it is too early for 47 d5+?! exd5+ 48 Kd4 Nc5!) 47 ... Nf6! (47 ...

Nxf2?! 48 d5+! exd5+ 49 Kd4 Ne4 50 Ke5 wins) 48 Bh6 Nd5 49 g3 Nf6 50 Be3! (Fridstein; 50 Bg5?! Ne4! draws, as does 50 d5+?! Nxd5 51 Kd4 Nxb4 52 Ke5 Kd7 53 Kf6 Nc6! Lilienthal) 50 ... Nd5 51 Bd2! Nf6 52 d5+! At last! Black has two replies:

1) 52 ... exd5+ 53 Kd4 Ne4 54 Be3! Kd6 55 b5 axb5 56 a6 Kc6 57 a7 Kb7 58 Kxd5 b4 59 Kc4 f4 60 Bxf4 Kxa7 61 Kxb4 Kb6 62 Kc4 Kc6 63 Kd4 Nxf2



Analysis diagram

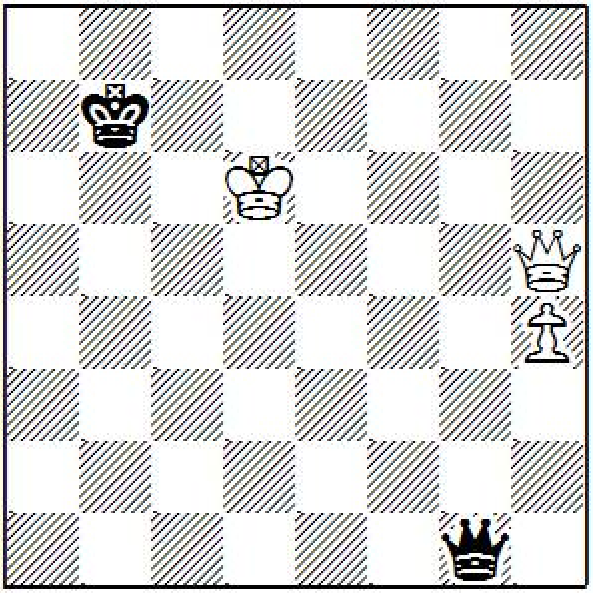
Lilienthal thought that this was a draw: 64 Ke5?! Nd3+ 65 Kf5 Nxf4 66 Kxf4 Kd5 67 Kg5 Ke4; 64 Ke3?! Nh3! 65 Bb8 Kd5 66 Ba7 Ng1. But Goldin demonstrated a win for White, based on zugzwang: 64 Bb8! Kb7 65 Be5 Kc6 66 Bf4 Kd7 67 Ke5 Ke7 68 Kf5 Kf7 69 Kg5 (*? – G.K.*) 69 ... Ke6 (*? – G.K.*) 70 Kxh5 Kf5 71 Kh6 Ne4 (or 71 ... Kf6 72 Bg5+ Kf5 73 Kg7 Ne4 74 Bf4) 72 Kg7 Nf6 73 Bb8! Ne8+ 74 Kh6 and 75 h5 (*64* 1999, No.8). Although the Russian master missed 69 ... Nh3+! and ... Nxf4 with an immediate draw, in general he evaluated the position correctly: instead of 69 Kg5? White wins by 69 Bb8! (the same key move) 69 ... Nh3 70 Ba7 Kg7 71 Be3 Kf7 72 Bd4 Ke7 73 Kg6 Ke6 74 Kxh5;

2) 52 ... Nxd5 53 Kd4 Kd6 54 Bf4+! Kd7! (inferior is 54 ... Kc6 55 Ke5 Kd7 56 Bd2 Ke7 57 b5 axb5 58 a6 Nb6 59 a7 Na8 60 Bb4+ Kd7 61 Kf6, or 54 ... Nxf4 55 gxf4 Kd7 56 Ke5 Ke7 57 b5) 55 Kc5! Nxf4! (55 ...

Nc3?! 56 Be5 Ne4+ 57 Kb6 Nxf2 58 b5) 56 gxf4 Kc7 57 b5 axb5 58 a6 b4 59 Kxb4 Kb6 60 Kc4! (Lilienthal's discovery; 60 a7?! Kxa7 61 Kc5 e5! 62 fxe5 f4 draws) 60 ... Kxa6 and now:

a) 61 Kd4 Kb5 62 Ke5 Kc4 63 Kxe6 Kd3 64 Kxf5 Ke2 65 Ke4! Kxf2 66 f5 g3 67 f6 g2 68 f7 g1Q 69 f8Q+ Ke2! (but not 69 ... Ke1? 70 Qb4+) 70 Qf3+ Kd2 71 Qxh5 (or 71 Qd3+ Kc1 72 Qe3+ Qxe3+ 73 Kxe3 Kc2) 71 ... Qe3+ 72 Kf5 Qc5+ 73 Kg6 Qd6+ 74 Kf7 Qd7+ 75 Kf6 Qd6+ with a draw;

b) 61 Kc5! e5 62 fxe5 Kb7! (62 ... f4? 63 e6) 63 Kd6 f4 64 e6 g3 65 fxg3 fxg3 66 e7 g2 67 e8Q g1Q 68 Qxh5



Analysis diagram

This queen ending looks more promising than the one reached in variation a): thanks to the position of the black king at b7, White hopes to defend against the checks and queen his h-pawn (*Shakhmaty v Rossii* 1998, Nos.5-6).

The database analytical module quickly establishes that if it is White to move he does indeed win, although with Black to move the position is after all a draw: 68 ... Qg3+ 69 Ke6 Qe3+ 70 Kf6 Qf4+ 71 Kg7 Qd4+! (but not 71 ... Qg3+? 72 Qg5 and ... mate in another 81 moves!) 72 Kh7 Qe4+ 73 Kh6 Kc8 74 Qg5 (or 74 Qc5+ Kd7 75 h5 Qf4+ 76 Kg7 Qg4+ 77 Kh8 Qf4 78 Qa7+ Ke8 79 Qg7 Qf8+ 80 Qg8 Ke7 81 Kh7 Qf5+ 82 Qg6 Qf7+ 83 Qg7 Ke8 84 h6 Qf5+) 74 ... Qc6+ 75 Qg6 Qc1+ 76 Kh7 Qc7+ 77 Kh8

Qc3+ 78 Qg7 Qh3 79 Qe7 Qc3+ 80 Kg8 Qb3+ 81 Kg7 Qg3+ 82 Qg5 Qc7+ 83 Kf8 Qd6+ 84 Kf7 Qc7+ with endless checks.

This historic ending drew the interest of some well-known analysts: Hübner (*Schach* 1998, No.8) and Timman (*New in Chess* 1999, No.7), who discovered a less thorny path to the draw: 42 ... Ke7 (but not 42 ... gxh3? 43 gxh3 Ke7 44 Kf3! winning) 43 Kd3 Kd7 44 Kc4 and now, instead of Alekhine's 44 ... Kc6 – 44 ... gxh3! 45 gxh3 Kc6 (whereas without the a-pawns White wins, as Karpov showed in a similar ending against Andersson, Skelleftea 1989). Hübner recommended 43 h4!? Kd7 44 Kd3 (in order after 44 ... Kc6 45 Kc4 to transpose into the 'main' variation), but Timman parried this by 44 ... Nb4+! 45 Kc4 Nc6 drawing (the black king has deprived the bishop of the c7-square).

In any case, nowadays such a position would have been played on until the last chance! Why then was Capa in a hurry to offer a draw, if he could have calmly analysed the endgame during the adjournment? Especially since, in view of his birthday (on 19th November the Cuban reached the age of 39) he had been granted an extra free day. Perhaps, being extremely tired and not seeing a winning plan, he decided not to waste his time and energy? Or had he noticed 40 Rb6 and, realising that he had missed a clear win, was terribly upset and could no longer bear the thought of resuming the game?!

Timman is probably correct, when he writes that Capablanca, in reconciling himself to a draw, had already resigned the match in the depths of his heart ...

Strangely enough, the importance of this truly decisive game was underestimated for several decades (everything was eclipsed by the champion's 'fatal' blunder in the 27th game). Probably because it was poorly analysed. Although it was the outcome of this game that changed chess history: had Capablanca won, the match score would have become 4-4, and since the Cuban only needed five wins to retain his title, he could well have remained champion, and it would have been very hard for Alekhine to obtain a second match. But after missing a win, Capablanca was depressed and finally broken: he lost the 32nd and 34th games, and with them the match.

On the whole, the reasons for the champion's failure are clear: excessive self-confidence and, as a consequence, weak preparation, a habitual inclination to try and win with little expenditure of effort, without tension and the calculation of ‘dangerous’ variations, hence the tactical errors, and then, after encountering an incredibly resourceful opponent and a number of heavy defeats – shock, despair, loss of belief in himself ... Even after pulling himself together, the Cuban was no longer able to change the course of the match. Here is what grandmaster Averbakh wrote about this:

‘It is impossible to ignore a highly important factor of the chess struggle – psychology. We wonder: why was Capablanca, at that time undoubtedly the best “technician” in the world, unable to win technically won positions in the 27th and 31st games? On one occasion Alekhine, during the period when he temporarily lost the world crown, explained his avoidance of the transition into a technical endgame by the fact that “I simply could not rely on my patience and nerves – which certainly would have been required for winning the endgame in question.” There you have it: technique is first and foremost nerves! And towards the end of the exhausting two-month marathon Capa’s were clearly not in good shape. It was for this reason that he was unable to win positions that in other conditions he would have easily converted into a win.’

I think nevertheless that Alekhine did not really like the character of the play between the 27th and 31st games (to say nothing of from the third to the seventh). He once again realised how mighty his opponent was, and so he was by no means eager for a return match, to which, according to the London agreement, the ex-champion had the right. Unfortunately, Capablanca did not immediately agree to play under the same conditions, but delayed his challenge and allowed Alekhine a formally legitimate opportunity to avoid a return match (the details of these dramas are given in the chapter on the fourth champion).

One can only guess how a second match between them would have gone. Capablanca, having learned from bitter experience, could have prepared properly for it. For the first time he would have had to give his all, from beginning to end! Given the Cuban’s colossal natural talent and the fact that he was still comparatively young (40 years old), the chess world had a chance of seeing him at the peak of his game.

An analysis of the match shows that in a second match too there would have been a very hard, roughly equal battle. If one takes the purely chess aspect, I would nevertheless have put my money on Capablanca (as also in the first match, had he approached it more seriously). But in matches of such calibre the human character also tells. Before Buenos Aires, Capa had never in his life had to exert himself strongly. Even in the match with Lasker he played at half-intensity, and this was sufficient. Whereas against Alekhine – no! And there is still the question of how long the Cuban would have withstood the unusually high tension ...

Capablanca was the first to experience the burden of an unlimited match and he severely criticised it: ‘Without a limit to the number of games,’ he wrote early in 1928 to the FIDE President Alexander Rueb, ‘it is quite possible that the match may never be finished, or that it may last so long as to make the result merely dependent on the physical and mental endurance of the players. In other words it would depend on who would be exhausted first, and not on who was the better player. This does not take into consideration the cost of the match, which evidently is greater the longer it lasts.’ Therefore Capablanca suggested restricting the number of games to 16 – i.e., if by that time neither of the players had achieved six wins, the winner of the match and the world champion would be simply the one who was leading (with the scores equal the champion would retain his title).

He sent a copy of this letter to Alekhine, but in reply the latter declared: ‘I won six games from you in fair play and I shall only recognise the superiority of one (be it you or another) who will also win six games from me.’ Nevertheless, Alekhine did later play matches that were limited to 30 games ...

FIDE also did not support Capablanca. On the contrary, it put forward a different, ‘official’ challenger – the FIDE champion Bogoljubow. (On the other hand, in the mid-70s FIDE supported Fischer, and then also Karpov, who dragged out of the archival dust the long-forgotten unlimited matches. In 1986 they were buried again – and this time, it would seem, for ever.)

In the Autumn of his Career

The former champion spent the decade after his failure in Buenos Aires in the desperate hope of playing another match for the crown. His first tournament appearance was Bad Kissingen 1928: 1. Bogoljubow – 8 out of 11; 2. Capablanca – 7; 3-4. Rubinstein and Euwe – 6½; 5. Nimzowitsch – 6; 6. Réti – 5½ etc. Capa’s ‘regular’ win against Bogoljubow was, alas, cancelled out by a defeat against Spielmann. Immediately after the tournament Bogoljubow challenged Alekhine to a match, and the latter accepted ...

Two months later the Cuban gave himself an excellent present on his 40th birthday, winning the double-round Berlin 1928 in good style: 1. Capablanca – 8½ out of 12; 2. Nimzowitsch – 7; 3. Spielmann – 6½; 4. Tartakower – 5½; 5-6. Réti and Rubinstein – 5 etc.

He was far less gladdened by the grandiose Carlsbad 1929: 1. Nimzowitsch – 15 out of 21; 2-3. Capablanca and Spielmann – 14½; 4. Rubinstein – 13½; 5-7. Becker, Vidmar and Euwe – 12; 8. Bogoljubow – 11½ etc. Two defeats with Black, against Sämisch and again against Spielmann, deprived the former champion of first place, and the only consolation was the failure of his rival Bogoljubow.

Incidentally, in the Sämisch-Capablanca game an unusual curiosity occurred: **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 a3** (Sämisch's patent!) **4 ... Bxc3+ 5 bxc3 d6 6 f3 e5 7 e4 Nc6 8 Be3 b6 9 Bd3 Ba6??** (an 'automatic' move) **10 Qa4 Bb7 11 d5** and Black lost his knight. The secret of this 'blunder of the year' was revealed by the victim himself. It turns out that before Capa's ninth move a beautiful brunette appeared in the hall – his wife Gloria, who had turned up out of the blue from Havana. This 'opening surprise' shocked the master: he was having an affair with a beautiful blonde ... (Later his first marriage, which had produced a son and a daughter, broke up, and Capa remarried.)

After this, as he had also done before, the ex-champion won several less important tournaments, but in Hastings 1930/31, after losing unexpectedly to Sultan Khan, he finished half a point behind Euwe. Then he decided to play a match of 10 games with the Dutchman, who was now one of the world elite, and he gained a convincing 6-4 victory (+2 =8). 'The Cuban was able to demonstrate his superiority over Euwe more effectively than did Alekhine and Bogoljubow,' wrote the magazine *Shakhmaty v SSSR*. 'Therefore the sooner that the long-awaited Alekhine-Capablanca return match takes place, the more that chess will gain from this. For the present champion, Capablanca, despite all his "fractures", is still the most dangerous opponent.'

Alas, the world economic crisis buried hopes of a return match. Correspondence with Alekhine led to a complete severing of relations between the historic opponents – they even stopped playing in the same tournaments ...

‘Capablanca used to talk calmly and moderately about everything,’ recalls Alexander Koblenz. ‘However, when our conversation turned to the problems of the battle for the world championship, in front of me was a quite different person: an enraged lion, although with the fervour typical only of a southerner, with his temperamental patter, which made it hard to follow the torrent of his indignant exclamations and words. This was obviously a very sore point with the Cuban ... His soul was still tormented by thoughts of the loss of the crown. He spoke with incredible ardour. The defeat had inflamed his ambition! Capablanca was convinced that Alekhine was inferior to him both in strength, and in talent; a superiority complex had taken root in him, preventing him from soberly and objectively evaluating the deserved and splendid victory of his opponent. He was indignant at the inertness of the chess world in organising his return match with Alekhine. He spoke scornfully about FIDE and at the same time about “this entire chess community” ... As regards Alekhine’s two matches with Bogoljubow, a player who the Cuban, in his own words, always went at it hammer and tongs, Capablanca considered them to be an obscene farce.’

After the match with Euwe, Capablanca disappeared from Europe for nearly four years, restricting himself to record-breaking simultaneous displays in USA, Cuba and Mexico. His debut after the break in Hastings 1934/35 brought him a crushing defeat against Lilienthal and general disappointment: 1-3. Thomas, Flohr and Euwe – 6½ out of 9; 4. Capablanca – 5½; 5-6. Botvinnik and Lilienthal – 5 etc. In Moscow 1935 Capa was again fourth, this time with two defeats (against Lasker and Ryumin), behind Botvinnik, Flohr and his ‘eternal’ opponent Lasker. In Margate 1935 he finished half a point behind the young Reshevsky, losing to him in their individual game ...

It appeared that the star of the Cuban genius was about to set. But here – miraculously! – in late 1935 Alekhine lost the chess crown to Euwe. Unexpectedly there was a chance for Capablanca to regain the throne! I think that this factor and his young wife, the Russian émigré Olga Chegodaev (whom I had the pleasure of meeting half a century later), inspired Capa with new strength, and in 1936 he played brilliantly in Moscow: 1. Capablanca – 13 out of 18; 2. Botvinnik – 12; 3. Flohr – 9½; 4. Lilienthal – 9; 5. Ragozin – 8½; 6. Lasker – 8 etc. And then in the ‘tournament of champions’ in Nottingham: 1-2. Botvinnik and Capablanca – 10 out of 14; 3-5. Reshevsky, Fine and Euwe – 9½; 6. Alekhine – 9; 7-8.

Lasker and Flohr – 8½; 9. Vidmar – 6; 10-11. Bogoljubow and Tartakower – 5½ etc.

The young Smyslov, who in those years visited the Moscow international tournaments, later recalled: ‘I was especially attracted by the play of Lasker and Capablanca, whose names, even in their lifetimes, were legendary. Capablanca’s play was notable for its unique intuition and for its easy and spontaneous manner.’

Let’s examine two examples of Capa’s later play, two specimens of his famous technique. First, a lesson on his favourite theme ‘bishop out of play’. After defeating Botvinnik the previous day in a sharp battle, the Cuban had become the sole leader and he arrived for his game with Lilienthal in excellent spirits. It was time to repay a little debt!

Game 108

J.R.Capablanca-A.Lilienthal

Moscow 1936, 8th round

Réti Opening A12

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6 3 b3

In the footsteps of Réti! Thus, with the help of the champions, hypermodern ideas became classical ...

3 ... Bf5 4 Bb2 e6 5 g3 Nf6 6 Bg2 Nbd7 7 0-0 h6

‘This move, preserving the f5-bishop from exchange, is completely unnecessary.’ (Capablanca) In the source game Lasker played 7 ... Bd6 (*Game No.71*), but 7 ... Be7 8 d3 0-0 9 Nbd2 a5!? is also good, with the idea of 10 Nh4 Bg4 11 h3 Bh5 12 g4 Bg6 13 Nxg6 hxg6 equalising.

8 d3 Be7

8 ... Bc5 is also possible, for example: 9 Nbd2 0-0 10 Qc2 Qe7 11 e4 dxe4 12 dxe4 Bh7 13 a3 a5 14 h3 Bb6 15 Bc3 Nc5 16 Ne5 Rfd8 (Keres-Euwe, AVRO Tournament, Holland 1938), or 9 Nc3 0-0 10 Qc2 Bh7 11 e4 dxe4 (Smyslov-Keres, 19th USSR Championship, Moscow 1951) with equal chances in both cases.

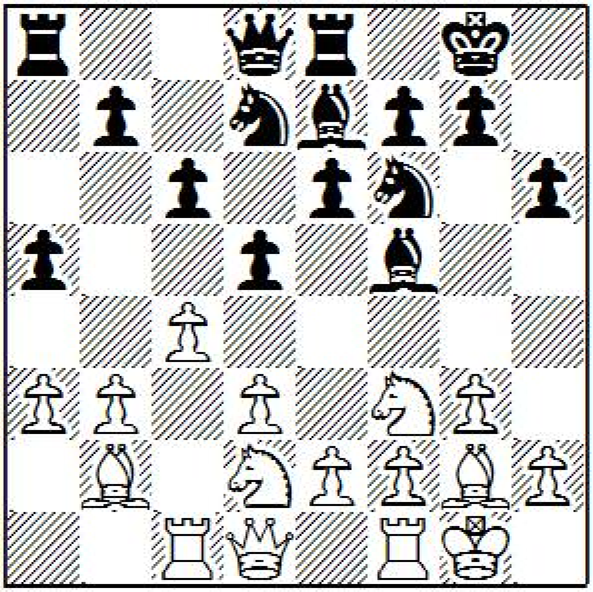
9 Nbd2 0-0 10 Rc1

Or 10 a3 a5 11 Qc2 Bh7! 12 Rac1 (12 Bc3 b5! equalises Botvinnik-Smyslov, Moscow 12th matchgame 1958) 12 ... Bd6 with the intention of ...

Qe7 and ... e6-e5.

10 ... a5 11 a3 (to answer ... a5-a4 with b3-b4, avoiding the opening of the a-file) **11 ... Re8**

11 ... Bh7! is slightly more accurate, since then after 12 Rc2, apart from 12 ... Re8, also possible is 12 ... Ne8!? 13 Qa1 Bf6, 12 ... Qb6!? 13 Qa1 Rfd8, or Lasker's 12 ... Bd6!? 13 Qa1 Qe7.



12 Rc2 Bh7

The imprudent 12 ... e5? 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 Bxe5 Bxa3 is refuted by 15 Bxf6! gxf6 16 cxd5 cxd5 17 e4 with a dangerous initiative.

13 Qa1 Bf8

13 ... Qb6 has also been played (Stein-Tal, Moscow 1971), as well as 13 ... Bd6 14 Ne5 Bf8! (Lobron-Karpov, Lucerne 1985). I think that this position is an altogether barren one for White: he does not even have a hint of an advantage.

14 Re1 Qb6 15 Bh3 Bc5

'Black's moves show that he has not yet decided on a definite plan. With the aim of preparing ... e6-e5, ... Bd6 and ... Qb8 looks logical.' (Capablanca) Or 15 ... Rad8!? and ... c6-c5.

16 Rf1 Bf8 17 Rcc1 Rad8 18 Rfe1 Bc5!?

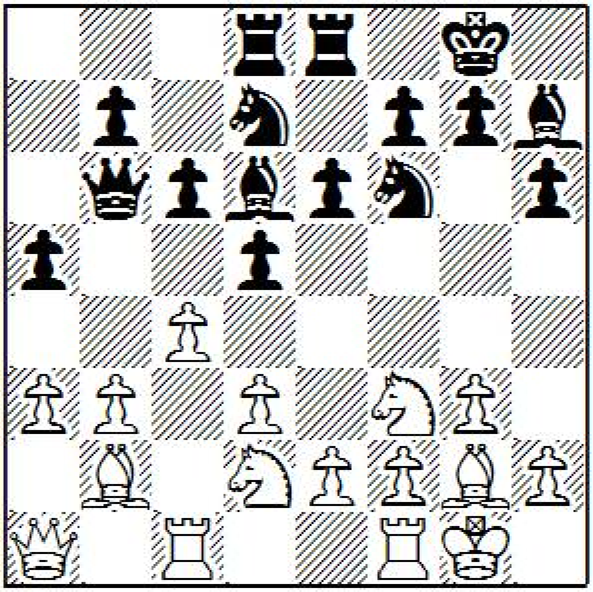
Provoking d3-d4, which would activate the bishop at h7 and give Black a more comfortable game. 18 ... c5 weakens the centre – 19 e4! dxe4 (worse is 19 ... d4?! 20 e5 Nh5 21 Bg4! Bg6 22 Nh4) 20 dxe4 e5 21 Re2 Qc7 22 Rce1 and Nb1-c3-d5 with some advantage.

19 Rf1!? Bf8 20 Bg2

'If 20 Ne5?! there could have followed 20 ... Nxe5 21 Bxe5 Nd7 22 Bb2 f6 and then ... e6-e5.' (Capablanca)

20 ... Bd6

Hinting at ... e6-e5. Now, when the bishop has retreated to g2, 20 ... c5!? also came into consideration.



21 Ne5! Bxe5 (21 ... Bf8! was more solid) **22 Bxe5 Nxe5 23 Qxe5 Nd7**

'23 ... d4? is bad in view of 24 c5 Qb5 25 Nc4 Re7 26 Nd6 Qxb3 27 Rb1 Qxa3 28 Nxb7 Rc8 29 Ra1 Qb4 30 Nxa5 etc. 23 ... Ng4?! 24 Qb2 d4 is also insufficient because of 25 b4, c4-c5 and Nc4-d6.' (Capablanca) But 23 ... c5!? 24 Qc3 d4 and ... e6-e5-e4 is acceptable.

24 Qb2 Nf6?!

'Correct is 24 ... c5! and ... Nb8-c6. White could not take twice on d5 in view of the loss of the e2-pawn.' (Capablanca)

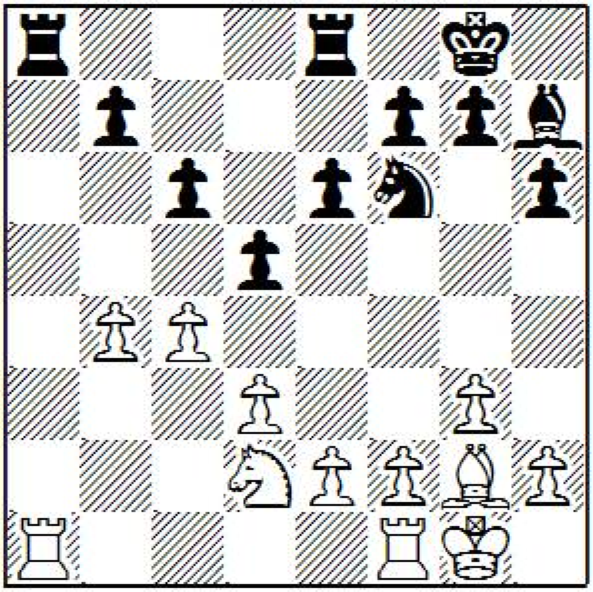
25 b4! axb4 26 Qxb4! Qxb4

If 26 ... Qc7 there would have followed 27 Rb1 Re7 28 Rb3 with mild but enduring pressure.

27 axb4 Ra8?

An important moment, on which Capablanca makes no comment! After 27 ... dxc4 28 Nxc4 Rd4 29 Na5 Rxb4 30 Rb1 White would have regained his pawn with some advantage. But 27 ... e5! – in order to free the h7-bishop by ... e5-e4 – would have led to exchanges and a rapid draw: 28 cxd5 (28 Ra1?! e4!) 28 ... Nxd5 29 b5 cxb5 30 Rc5 Nf6 31 Bxb7 (or 31 Rxb5 e4!) 31 ... e4 32 Bc6 Re7 33 Nxe4 Bxe4 34 dxe4 Nxe4 35 Rxb5 Nc3.

28 Ra1



'I had this position in mind back on my 21st move. The ending is advantageous to White: he has a strong-point at a5, enabling him to double rooks on the a-file. In addition, the g2-bishop is strong, whereas the h7-bishop is out of play for a long time.' (Capablanca)

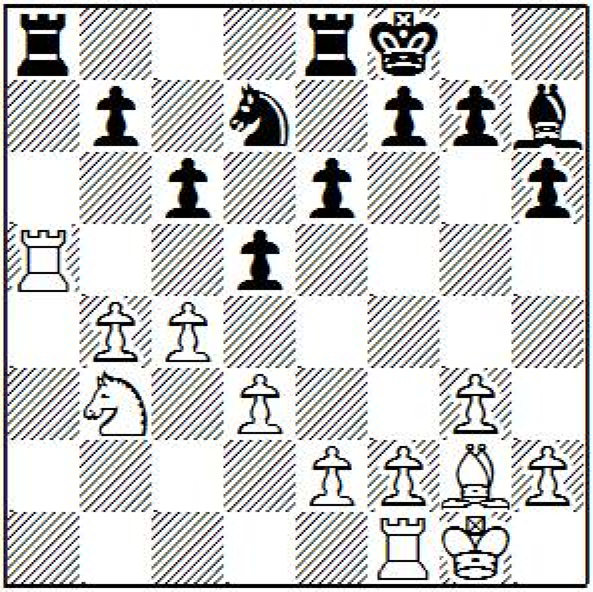
28 ... Nd7?!

The best chance was still 28 ... e5!, for example: 29 cxd5 Nxd5 30 Bxd5 (30 b5?! Nc3!) 30 ... cxd5 31 Nb3 e4 32 d4 Bf5, or 29 c5 e4! 30 d4 e3 (30 ... Bf5!?) 31 fxe3 Rxa1 32 Rxa1 Rxe3 33 Ra8+ Re8 34 Rxe8+ Nxe8 35 Bh3 f5 36 e3 Nc7 with good chances of a draw.

29 Nb3 Kf8

Black's mounting difficulties are illustrated by the variations 29 ... Nb6?! 30 c5 Nd7 31 Ra5! b6 32 cxb6 Rab8 33 Ra7 Nxb6 34 Nd4 Nc8 35 Rc7 Rxb4 36 Nxc6 (with the threat of Rxc8+) and 29 ... b6?! 30 b5! cxb5 31 cxd5 e5 (31 ... exd5 32 Nd4) 32 d6 etc.

30 Ra5! (30 c5 e5 31 Bh3 Ke7 is unclear)



30 ... dxc4?

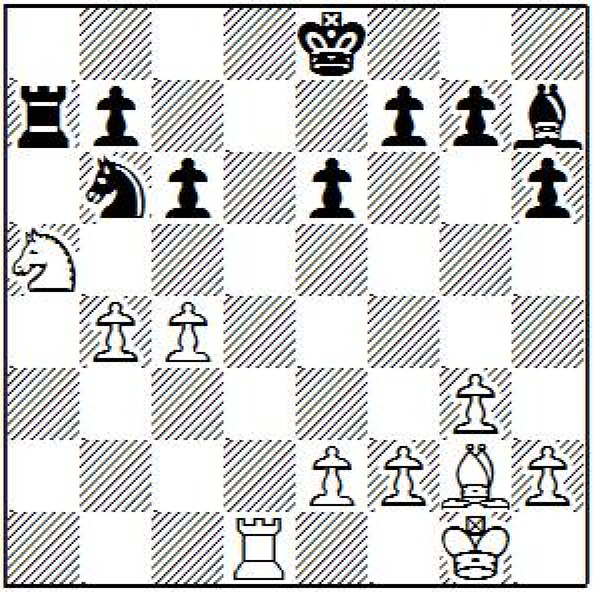
‘The decisive mistake. The only defence was 30 ... Ke7 (*if 30 ... b6?!, then 31 Rxa8 Rxa8 32 b5! cxb5 33 cxd5 e5 34 Rc1 and d5-d6 is good – G. K.*) 31 Rfa1 Rxa5 32 Rxa5 Kd6 33 Ra7 Kc7 34 Na5 Rb8. Although after 35 c5 Black is blockaded, no forced win for White is apparent.’ (Capablanca)

31 dxc4 Nb6 32 Rxa8! Rxa8 33 Na5! Ra7

No better is 33 ... Rb8 34 Rd1 e5 (34 ... Ke7 35 Bxc6!; 34 ... Bc2 35 Rd2 Ba4? 36 Ra2 and Kf1-e1) 35 Rd6 Ke8 (35 ... Ke7 36 Rxc6!) 36 b5 Nc8 37 Rd2 cxb5 38 cxb5 b6 39 Nc6 winning.

34 Rd1! (with the threat of 35 Bxc6 bxc6 36 Rd8+ Ke7 37 Nxc6+) **34 ... Ke8**

If 34 ... f6? (34 ... Ke7? 35 Bxc6!), then 35 Rd8+ Kf7 36 Rb8 wins.



35 Nxb7!

‘The quickest way to win. The combination gives White a rook and two passed pawns for a bishop and knight. These minor pieces are unable to cope with the passed pawns, supported by the rook.’ (Capablanca)

‘A typical Capablanca exchanging operation in the endgame. In general he liked playing with rook and two pawns against two minor pieces.’ (Botvinnik)

35 ... Rxb7 36 Bxc6+ Rd7 37 c5 Ke7

Or 37 ... Nd5 (37 ... Be4? 38 Rxd7!) 38 f3 f5 39 b5 Ke7 40 Bxd7 Kxd7 41 Ra1! and wins.

38 Bxd7 Nxd7 39 c6 Nb6 40 c7 Bf5 41 Rd8

‘By 41 e4 Bg4 42 f3 Bxf3 43 Rd8 Bxe4 44 c8Q White could have won a piece, remaining with the exchange for a pawn, but this would only have prolonged the game.’ (Capablanca)

41 ... e5 42 Rb8! (but not 42 b5? Nc8) **42 ... Nc8**

If 42 ... Nd5, then 43 c8Q Bxc8 44 Rxc8 Nxb4 45 Rc7+ Ke6 46 e4!

43 b5 Kd6 44 b6 Ne7 (44 ... Kc6 45 b7 etc.) **45 Rf8**

Again there was another way to win – 45 c8Q Nxc8 46 b7 Kc7 47 bxc8Q+ Bxc8 48 Ra8.

45 ... Bc8 46 Rxf7 Nd5 (or 46 ... g6 47 Rf6+ Kd7 48 h4) **47 Rxg7 Nxb6 48 Rh7 Nd5 49 Rxh6+ Kxc7 50 e4 Ne7 51 f3 Kd7 52 h4 Ke8 53**

Rf6 Ng8?

An oversight, but 53 ... Bd7 54 h5 Ng8 55 Rg6 Kf7 56 Rg5 would also not have saved the game.

54 Rc6 1-0

54 ... Bd7 55 Rc5 and Rxe5. This game won the third special prize ‘for the best game’!

In the following well-known game with one of the Soviet masters, the 47-year-old ex-champion, after obtaining clearly the better position, did not perhaps play with the accuracy of his former years. But this in no way diminishes the prettiness and instructional importance of this complex endgame.

Game 109

I.Kan-J.R.Capablanca

Moscow 1936, 10th round

Vienna Game C25

1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Bc5

‘Theory recommends (in this opening) that the knights should first be developed, but Black wanted to avoid the hackneyed variations with 2 ... Nf6 3 f4 d5 etc.’ (Capablanca)

3 Nf3 (3 f4 d6 4 Nf3 is sharper, but Kan is thinking only in terms of a draw) **3 ... d6 4 Na4**

The ‘theoretical’ 4 d4 exd4 5 Nxd4 also merely gives White slightly the freer game.

4 ... Bb6 5 Nxb6 axb6 6 d4 exd4 (6 ... Qe7!? Larsen) **7 Qxd4 Qf6**

If 7 ... Nf6, then 8 Bg5. Capa happily offers the exchange of queens, hoping, not without justification, to outplay his opponent in the endgame.

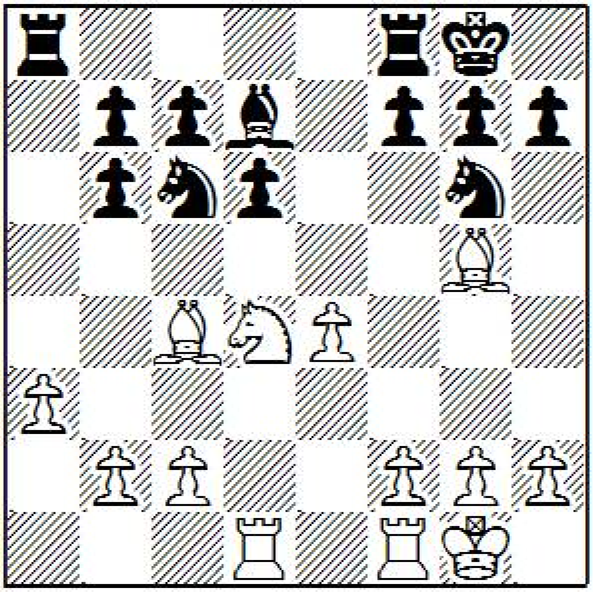
8 Bg5!?

The well-known game Schlechter-Janowski (San Sebastian 1911) went 8 Bd3 Nc6 9 Qe3 Nge7 10 0-0 0-0 11 c3 Ng6 12 Nd4 Nxd4 13 cxd4 Ra4 with equality.

8 ... Qxd4 9 Nxd4 Bd7 10 Bc4 (10 Nb5!?) **10 ... Ne7 11 0-0 Ng6**

‘Before castling it is necessary to prevent 12 f4, after which there now follows 12 ... h6 13 f5 Ne5 winning.’ (Capablanca)

12 a3 (12 Nb5!?) **12 ... 0-0 13 Rad1 Nc6**



14 Nxc6?!

The first of a series of minor mistakes. ‘With this exchange White merely increases the value of the black pawns.’ (Capablanca) Here 14 Nb5?! would now be a blank shot on account of 14 ... Nce5 15 Be2 Bxb5 16 Bxb5 Ra5 17 Be2 Nf3+! 18 Bxf3 Rxg5. But, as the Cuban showed, correct was 14 Bc1! (14 ... Ra4?! 15 b3! and 16 a4). I think that if the players were to have changed places, Capa would quickly have shown Kan what is meant by the two bishops and what they are capable of ...

14 ... bxc6 (Black has acquired a compact pawn skeleton, which in the end he is able to exploit) **15 Bd2?!**

Not realising that 15 Bc1! should be played as soon as possible, then b2-b3 and a3-a4.

15 ... Ra4! 16 Bd3 Ne5 17 Bc3 f6 18 f3

Perhaps it would have been better to drive away the knight by 18 f4. White’s position is already slightly worse, but as yet he has no particular weaknesses, and Kan decided simply to stand his ground.

18 ... Re8 19 Rf2 (a peaceful outcome seems almost inevitable, but we will not jump to conclusions) **19 ... Bc8!**

First Capa deprives White of the advantage of the two bishops. In his words, ‘in the event of 19 ... Nxd3?! the opposite-coloured bishops would have assured White of a certain draw.'

20 Bf1

The manoeuvre ... Ba6 could have been prevented by 20 Ra1!? with the idea of b2-b3 and a3-a4. Or 20 Bb4!? (with the same idea) 20 ... c5 21 Bc3 and Black has merely a symbolic advantage.

20 ... Ba6 21 Bxa6?!

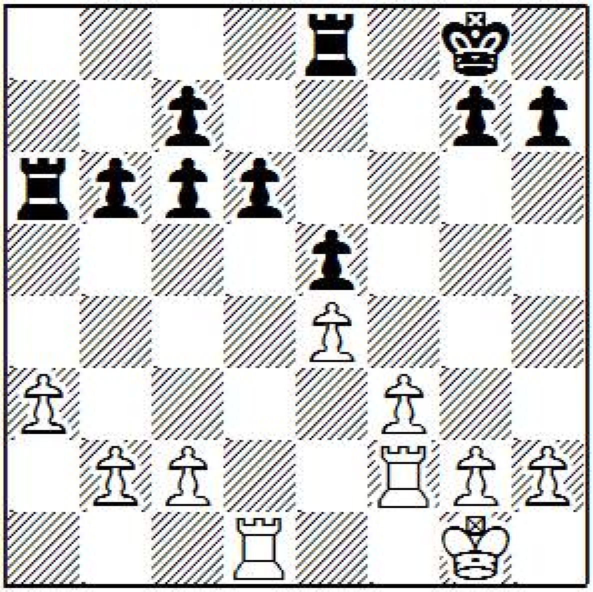
Stronger is 21 Rd4!, exchanging the active black rook and achieving an objectively drawn position.

21 ... Rxa6 22 Bxe5?!

But this exchange improves Black's pawn structure and gives him the possibility of attacking on both wings. Of course, all the same Capa had a fairly clear plan (... c6-c5, ... Nc6, ... Kf7-e6 and ... b6-b5-b4), but as long as White does not take on e5, his position is comparatively safe.

22 ... fxe5

'It is now clear that Black stands better. His pawn mass is concentrated closer to the centre and his rooks control open files.' (Capablanca) In aiming for a draw, Kan has tried to exchange as many pieces as possible and, as often happens, he has overdone it.



23 Rd3?!

Black's possibilities would have been restricted by 23 c4!, although here too he would take his king to the centre, play ... c6-c5 and begin an attack with ... g7-g5-g4, to create weaknesses in the enemy position. Of course, with accurate play White should be able to defend (as Capa writes, ‘the neutralising tendency of rook endings is significant’, but in practice everything is decided by the difference in class ...

23 ... b5! (‘just the same’, only Black has seized another little bit of space) **24 Rfd2 c5 25 Kf2 Ra4!**

‘A timely prevention of White’s attempt to free himself by f2-f4.’ (Capablanca)

26 Ke2 Kf7 27 Rd1 Ke6

Now there is the plan of a breakthrough by ... c7-c6 and ... d6-d5, and all the time White has to watch for this. Over some dozen moves his position has been transformed from slightly better to passive and unpleasant.

28 Kd2

White does not know what to do, and hence he awaits the threats. 28 h4!? came into consideration.

28 ... Rb8

More direct was 28 ... Rd8!? (or 28 ... c4 29 Rc3 Rc8!?) with the idea of ... c7-c6 and ... d6-d5. However, Capa’s basic principle was not to create weaknesses for himself without extreme necessity. And he defers the advance in the centre until the decisive moment, when the opponent will already be ‘ripe’.

29 Rc3 (or 29 Ke3 g5; 29 h4!?) **29 ... g5**

A typical attack by a pawn minority on the kingside. Also suitable was 29 ... Rf8 30 Ke3 c4! (30 ... g5 31 Rcd3 c4 32 R3d2!) 31 Kd2 c6 with the threat of ... d6-d5-d4 or the preparatory centralisation 29 ... Rd4+!

30 h3

The alternative plan was to keep the h-file closed: 30 Ke3 g4 (30 ... c4 31 Kd2; 30 ... c6 31 g3; 30 ... Rf8 31 Rcd3) 31 Rd2 Rg8 32 Rb3 etc.

30 ... h5 (30 ... Rf8 31 Ke3 c4 32 Kd2 with the idea of b2-b3; 30 ... c6!?) **31 Rh1**

Neutralising the ... g5-g4 breakthrough, but 31 Ke3!? would appear to be better.

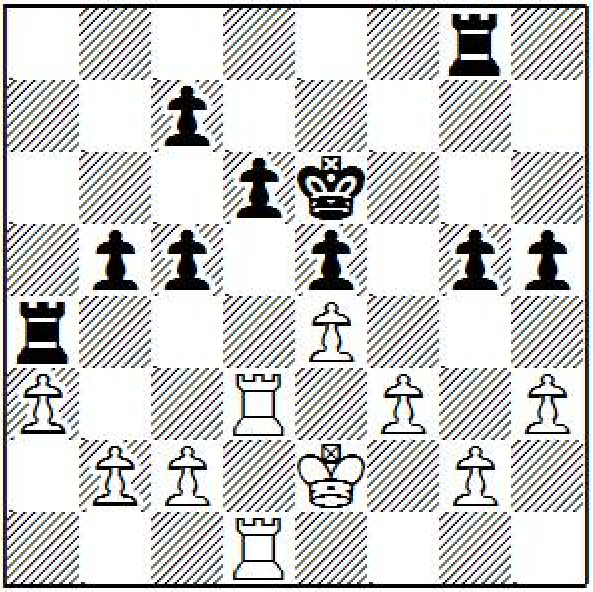
31 ... Rd4+ (31 ... Rg8 32 Ke2 c6! 33 Rd3 d5 etc. was also good) **32 Ke2**

But not 32 Rd3?! c4 33 Rxd4 exd4 34 h4 Rg8 and ... Ke5-f4-g3 with an overwhelming advantage for Black.

32 ... Rg8

‘Forestalling a possible h3-h4.’ (Capablanca) Again 32 ... c6!? with the idea of ... c5-c4 and ... d6-d5 was tempting.

33 Rd3 Ra4 (it is important to retain the active rook) **34 Rhd1**



34 ... g4?!

Euwe, the current world champion, called this game ‘the best of all those seen up till then in this tournament: Capablanca plays the endgame with exceptional mastery.’ Here it is – the magic of the name and the result! I agree that it all looks logical and pretty, but better was 34 ... Rb8! (but not immediately 34 ... c4?! on account of 35 Rd5) 35 Rh1 c4 36 Rd2 Rg8! followed by ... c7-c6 and ... d6-d5: towards the centre!

35 hxg4 hxg4 36 Ke3

Conceding the h-file. After 36 Rh1 gxf3+ 37 gxf3 Rg2+ 38 Kd1 b4 (with the threat of ... c5-c4-c3) 39 Rb3 Kd7 40 Kc1 Kc6 Black would have retained winning chances.

36 ... Rh8! (the typical seizure of a file) **37 Rb3!**

‘Clearly bad was 37 fxg4? Rg8 38 Kf3 Rf8+ 39 Ke3 Rf4. Also after 37 f4?! exf4+ 38 Kxf4 Rf8+ 39 Ke3 Rh8 (*39 ... g3!?; 39 ... Kd7! – G. K.*) White’s position is unenviable.’ (Capablanca)

37 ... Rh2 38 Rd2 Rd4! (38 ... c6? 39 fxg4) **39 Re2**

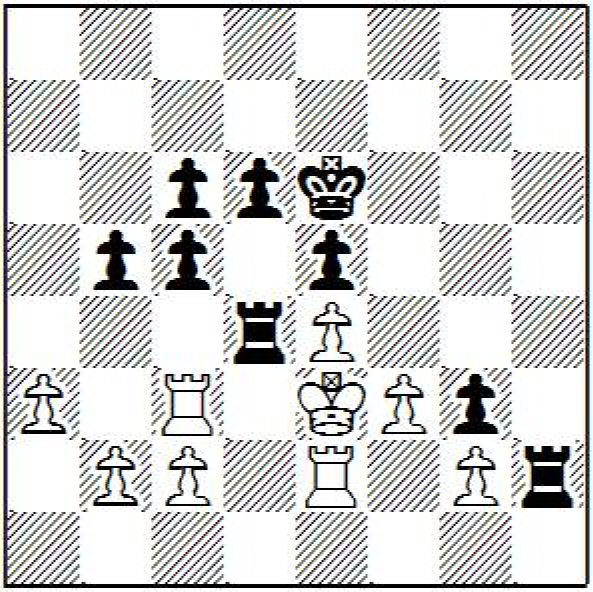
Kan defends with all his might! 39 Rxd4?! (39 Rbd3? c4!) 39 ... cxd4+ 40 Kf2 gxf3 41 Kxf3 c6 is advantageous to Black.

39 ... c6 40 Rc3

Dubious is 40 f4?! d5! or 40 Rd3?! Rh1 41 Kf2 Rxd3 42 cxd3 Rd1 43 Ke3 g3 etc. However, White could have simply taken the pawn – 40 fxg4, although after 40 ... c4! (40 ... Kf6?! 41 Rd3!) 41 Rc3 Kf6 (Capablanca) Black would still have retained some advantage thanks to his strong rook at d4: 42 b3 cxb3 43 cxb3 c5 or 42 Kf3 Kg5 43 Rce3 Rh6!

40 ... g3?!

The last move before the control, and probably made in time-trouble. After 40 ... Rd1 White has 41 Rd3, while if 40 ... c4 or 40 ... Kf6, then simply 41 fxg4. But 40 ... Rh1! would still have retained the advantage: 41 fxg4 (41 Kf2 Rb1!) 41 ... Rf1 (with the threat of ... Rf4) 42 g3 c4 43 g5 d5 etc.



41 Rd3?

The sealed move and, it would appear, the result of the time scramble. ‘When I arrived for the start of the adjournment session,’ recalls Kan, ‘a member of the tournament committee came up to me and said: ‘Señor Capablanca offers you a draw, if you have sealed 41 f4.’ Alas, I had sealed another move and so I was obliged to “decline” this offer.’

As Capa observed, ‘41 f4! was the only saving possibility, for example: 41 ... Rh4 42 fxe5 Rdxe4+ 43 Kf3 Rhf4+ 44 Kxg3 Rg4+ 45 Kf3 Rxe2 46 Kxe2 Rxg2+ 47 Kf3 Rh2 48 Kg3 and 49 exd6 drawing.’ The computer confirms this evaluation: it is not clear why Black should be any better here. But it would be interesting to know where the commentators, who praised his position, were looking?

41 ... Rh1! 42 f4?!

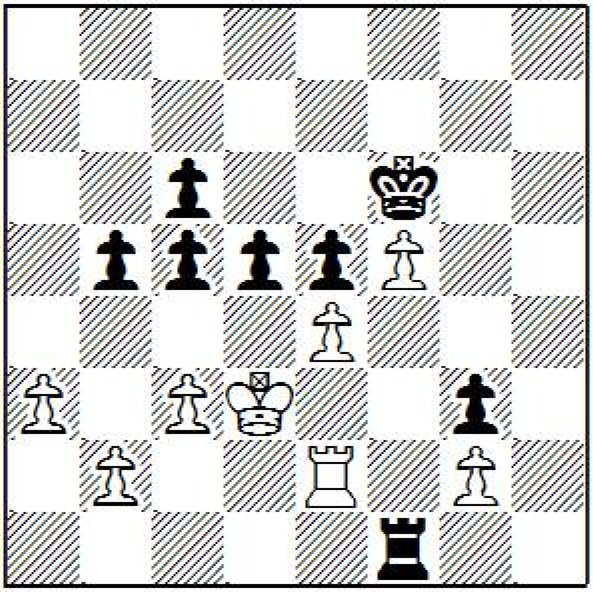
Now this loses, and instantly. After 42 Rb3 there could have followed 42 ... c4, then ... Rf1, ... Rdd1 and ... d6-d5, while if 42 c3, then 42 ... Rxd3+ 43 Kxd3 d5.

42 ... Rf1!

Once again a typical endgame manoeuvre: the rook cuts off the king from the g3-pawn. After retaining it, Black begins a decisive breakthrough in the centre and on the queenside.

43 f5+ (no better is 43 fxe5 Kxe5 44 Kd2 c4 or 44 Rxd4 cxd4+ 45 Kd2 c5 winning) **43 ... Kf6 44 c3 Rxd3+ 45 Kxd3 d5!**

Black’s pawn avalanche begins moving, sweeping away everything in its path.



46 b3 (otherwise 46 ... c4+ 47 Ke3 Rf4) **46 ... c4+**

‘46 ... Ra1! would appear to be the strongest, but the text move is also sufficient.’ (Capablanca)

47 bxc4 bxc4+ 48 Ke3 (if 48 Kd2 Black would have won by 48 ... Ra1, while if 48 Kc2 – 48 ... d4!) **48 ... Ra1!**

Clearing the board of white pawns. 48 ... Rf4 was also good (but not 48 ... Rc1?! 49 Ra2!).

49 Kf3 Rxa3 50 Kxg3 (or 50 Re3 Rb3! 51 Kxg3 d4) **50 ... Rxc3+ 51 Kh4 Rc1! 52 g4**

The last chance: g4-g5.

52 ... Rh1+ 53 Kg3 d4 54 Ra2 d3 55 Kg2 Re1 56 Kf2 Rxe4 57 Kf3 0-1

Finally White resigned. 'The rook ending deserves careful study.' (Capablanca) We have partly fulfilled this behest ...

Incidentally, at this tournament Kan made an interesting observation about a joint analysis by Lasker and Capablanca. 'There was a stamp of extraordinary natural talent on the style of Capablanca's analysis. The thoughtful and unhurried manner, with which Lasker analysed a position that interested both ex-champions, was in marked contrast to the almost lightning speed with which Capablanca demonstrated subtle and unexpected variations. It also showed, of course, Capablanca's extraordinarily fine technique.'

After Nottingham 1936, where Capa together with Botvinnik finished ahead of the world champion Euwe, ex-champion Alekhine, Lasker and a whole cohort of contenders (again undefeated, and also with a win against Alekhine!), the press wrote that the Cuban had acquired his earlier form and had good chances of regaining his champion's title. That is also what Capablanca thought, adding: if his health would hold out.

'Of all the questions interesting the chess world, perhaps the most important is the question of the world championship title,' he wrote in *Izvestia* on 10 January 1937, and he admitted a serious mistake that was made in producing the London agreement (1922): 'I did not take into consideration the fact that the world champion, if he desires, is able to delay the moment when he meets a dangerous, in his opinion, opponent.' What was to be done? Capa suggested giving FIDE the right to organise matches for the crown. Euwe was also inclined this way. But six months later, when FIDE nominated the No.1 challenger as ... Flohr(!), they saw that this idea was premature.

In the resulting confusion, without waiting for the Euwe-Alekhine return match in the autumn, Capablanca secured the agreement of Euwe to play a match with him in 1939 (a year before the planned FIDE match with Flohr). But the return match was won by Alekhine, and the Cuban's path to the throne was again blocked ...

However, Semmering-Baden 1937 and especially the AVRO tournament of 1938, where for the first time in his life Capa finished outside the prize list, in seventh place, last but one, showed that the 50-year-old ex-champion was no longer able to combat the leaders of the new generation; in addition, on his actual birthday he lost to his 'sworn friend' Alekhine (*Game No.147*). The latter, incidentally, later gave a simple explanation for this failure: 'Towards the end of his days Capablanca could still create chess masterpieces, but he no longer had sufficient stamina to achieve practical successes in a big tournament.'

But was it really all so simple? Lasker, for example, retained his stamina and did his utmost to crush the young even in later life ... It seems to me that the main reason for the decline in Capablanca's results was the increased complexity of chess, which happened precisely during the last period of his career. The hypermodern ideas had already become established and the 'Soviet Chess School' had announced itself – a different, dynamic and genuinely creative game had begun! Capa tried not to fall behind, but it became increasingly difficult for him. As we have seen, certain problems occurred with him already in the 20s, and in the 30s these were merely aggravated.

And in general Capablanca's heyday was, in my opinion, in the period before he became champion. It was then that he played the most interesting and fresh chess and demonstrated his colossal superiority over his contemporaries. It was on account of this that the myth of his invincibility arose: no one could see the slight, and sometimes serious flaws in his 'ultra-pure' style. But these mistakes were not accidental, and in the match with Alekhine they already became tragic, since they cancelled out all the fruits of his enormous preceding work. Capa was let down by his old illness – a certain carelessness in his play: if it is all succeeding, why exert oneself?

I have come to the paradoxical feeling that the 'Capablanca mystery' is that there is no mystery! Despite his staggering talent (or more probably, because of it), his real contribution to the creation of modern chess was inferior to that of Steinitz and Lasker. Their contribution was enormous and fundamental – they were the founders. Whereas Capablanca, by contrast, did everything possible to simplify the problems facing him, by dividing them into elementary components. Hence the impression that to him it was all easy and understandable – and hence the idea of the drawing death of chess.

For a good hundred years the impression had been created in public consciousness that chess players were a peculiar caste of people, devoted to some mysterious order, and that chess was a game for wise men, sitting in a café with a cup of coffee, thoughtfully smoking a cigar and seeking incredible moves that were unknown to anyone. But Capablanca destroyed this stereotype: to him everything was clear and simple, no mysteries! In 1910 he did indeed resemble Morphy: he arrived, conquered Europe – and again hid himself in America, leaving behind a train of general admiration. There is no doubt that the play of these two geniuses displayed the traditional spirit of the American continent: practicality and clarity. Everything should be nicely ordered!

And then, after the War, Capa altogether became the greatest of idols, since he was ‘close to the people’ and ideally in keeping with the era, expressing the joyful hopes of the post-war world. A kind of dream champion – handsome, a spoilt child of fortune and a chess god ... Meanwhile, an objective analysis of his games shows that Capablanca’s contribution to the development of the game was considerably less than the scale of his talent. Of course, his games provide a rich basis for any player’s development, but for all his positional discoveries he, alas, did not create anything global.

And if he did create something, it was largely before the First World War. It is a pity that Capa and Lasker did not play their match in 1914: they were both playing very well then, and a battle between them would have been extremely interesting for the future of chess. But, as has occurred many times in chess history, their match did not take place at the right time. By the 1920s Lasker was already beginning to decline, whereas Capablanca’s tremendous momentum kept him going. At that time they had no equals (Rubinstein was declining, and Alekhine was only beginning to rise), and no one could force Capa to work. In the absence of any real rivals he played at half power, exploiting his strength only to the extent that it was necessary. Therefore later, however much he tried, he could no longer keep up with chess progress ...

The Cuban’s last appearances were Margate 1939 (1. Keres – 7½ out of 9; 2-3. Capablanca and Flohr – 6½) and the World Olympiad in Buenos

Aires, where Capa, playing for the Cuban team, scored the best result on board 1. It is staggering that after the start of the Second World War he did not lose hopes of a return match with Alekhine and he even conducted discussions with the champion, while the latter was touring South America. Later Alekhine too was aiming for a match, dreaming of escaping from Europe ... But it was not to be.

On the evening of 7 March 1942, in the Manhattan Chess Club (where a year earlier Lasker had given his last simultaneous display), Capablanca suddenly suffered a severe headache and began to lose consciousness. He was rushed to hospital and the following morning, in the arms of his wife Olga, he died of a brain haemorrhage ... Havana buried its national hero with state honours.

In conclusion – another mosaic of noteworthy opinions by the champions.

Lasker: ‘I have known many chess players, but among them there has been only one genius – Capablanca! His ideal was to win by manoeuvring. Capablanca’s genius reveals itself in his probing of the opponent’s weak points. The slightest weakness cannot escape from his keen eye.’

Alekhine: ‘Capablanca was snatched too early from the chess world. With his death we have lost a great chess genius, the like of whom we will never see again.’

Botvinnik: ‘Capablanca’s play produced and still produces an irresistible artistic effect. In his games a tendency towards simplicity predominated, and in this simplicity there was a unique beauty of genuine depth.’

Tal: ‘Without technique it is impossible to reach the top in chess, and therefore we all try to borrow from Capablanca his wonderful, subtle technique.’

Petrosian: ‘I was brought up on the games of Capablanca and Nimzowitsch, and they became part of my chess flesh and blood.’

Fischer: ‘Capablanca was among the greatest of chess players, but not because of his endgame. His trick was to keep his openings simple, and then play with such brilliance in the middlegame that the game was decided ─ even though his opponent didn't always know it – before they arrived at the ending.

‘Capablanca never really devoted himself to chess, seldom made match preparations. His simplicity is a myth. His almost complete lack of book knowledge forced him to push harder to squeeze the utmost out of every position. Every move he made had to be super-sharp so as to make something out of nothing. His play was forced. He had to try harder than anybody else because he had so little to begin with.’

Karpov: ‘The ideal in chess can only be a collective image, but in my opinion it is Capablanca who most closely approaches this ... His book was the first chess book that I studied from cover to cover. Of course, his ideas influenced me.’

chapter five

Alexander the Fourth

Alexander Alexandrovich Alekhine (31 October 1892 – 24 March 1946) has been called a ‘genius of chess combinations’. However, his fantastic combinative vision was based on a sound positional foundation, and was the fruit of strong, energetic strategy. Therefore Alekhine can safely be called the pioneer of the universal style of play, based on a close interweaving of strategic and tactical motifs.

Alekhine was clearly ahead of his time in his approach to chess. According to my theory, the game of chess consists of three components: *material, time* and *quality of position*. And every player makes use of them as far as possible. With *material* everything is clear: on this arithmetic level even a computer ‘thinks’: extra pawn, extra piece – this is the ABC of chess science. The second factor – *time* – is more complicated, but also understandable: the gain of a tempo, the speed of a passed pawn’s advance or of the storming of the king’s fortress. By sacrificing material for a swift attack, it is precisely time that we take into account ... The third – *quality of position* – is the least obvious, strategic factor: pawn structure, strong and weak squares, active and passive pieces, two bishops, ‘bad’ king ... Here evaluation is a question of intuition, and an understanding of this factor is already a sign of great mastery. Well, and the highest skill is a subtle appreciation of all three factors! The ability to weigh up everything ‘for’ and ‘against’, to sacrifice something for the sake of weakening certain squares or, say, to spoil one’s pawns for the sake of a couple of tempi. This is accessible to very few: here one needs intuition, experience, God-given talent ...

And so, Alekhine was the first who began intuitively to combine all three factors in his play, linking them together. He demonstrated clearly that material is only one of the forms of advantage. In creating a certain type of position, he would sacrifice a pawn or two, or even a piece! Sometimes he would overstep the mark, but on the whole he proceeded on the basis that chess is highly diverse and that the sacrifice of material, which was strictly regulated by the Steinitz School, can in fact provide other advantages. And frequently Alekhine set his opponents problems with which they could not cope: they were unable to compete on such a level of complexity of play.

The masters of the next generation, headed by Botvinnik and Keres, already sacrificed more boldly: it had become a standard method! And in later years this fertile ground gave rise to Bronstein, Spassky, Tal ...

Chigorin’s Successor

Alekhine grew up and for many years lived in Moscow, on the Arbat, close to Smolensk Square, literally a few steps from my present home ... He was the third child in the family of a hereditary nobleman, where both adults and children were keen on chess. He began playing at the age of seven, and his main opponent became his older brother Alexey. Later their house was visited by some well-known masters of sharp combinative style, such as Nenarokov, Blumenfeld and Duz-Khotimirsky, and the latter even gave the future champion some paid lessons.

It should be said that in the transition period between the 19th and 20th centuries Moscow was a major chess centre, the second in Russia after St Petersburg: here the Lasker-Steinitz return match (1896/97) took place, as well as the 1st and 2nd all-Russian tournaments (1899 and 1900/01), where Chigorin won, and here there were visits by foreign stars, including Pillsbury with his record blindfold simultaneous display (1902). Good nourishment for the growth of a young talent! Alekhine was so infatuated with chess that during school lessons, according to one of his fellow-pupils, he ‘used to switch off from his surroundings and was not always fully aware of where he was.’ Once during an algebra test he suddenly leaped up and looked round the class with shining eyes, as usual twisting with his left hand his ginger forelock. ‘Well, Alekhine, have you solved it?’ asked the teacher. ‘Yes ... I sacrifice the knight, and White wins!’ The class burst out laughing ...

From the age of 12 Alekhine played seriously, mainly by correspondence, developing his analytical powers. He won a gambit correspondence tournament of the magazine *Shakhmatnoe obozrenie* (1905-1906) and in the autumn of 1907 he took part in over-the-board tournaments of the Moscow Chess Society, displaying amazing resourcefulness in difficult positions. As he later recalled, he even developed an unusual psychological weakness, which he was able to rid himself of only after a long time and with difficulty: ‘The impression that, on ending up in a bad position, I can always think up some unexpected combination and with the help of it escape from all my difficulties. A dangerous delusion!’

The idols of Alexander and Alexey were Morphy, Anderssen, La Bourdonnais and, of course, Chigorin, who in those years wrote popular chess columns in the magazine *Niva* and the newspaper *Novoe Vremya*. Already then there were mentions in the press about the Alekhine brothers, ‘of whom the younger, 15-year-old, is unusually talented.’ Duz-Khotimirsky related how a well-known player once whispered to him: ‘I have discovered a future world champion!’ And, sighing, he added: ‘For the moment he is only a Moscow schoolboy.’

In the summer of 1908 Alekhine went to Dusseldorf, to the 16th Congress of the German Chess Union, where he took part in a subsidiary tournament with the master norm. He wasn’t able to achieve it straightaway, but his foreign debut was not a bad one: a share of 4th-5th places (+8 -3 =2). Alekhine also played two short matches there: with Bardeleben (4½-½) and Fahrni (1½-½). And the main thing – at precisely that time in Dusseldorf the Lasker-Tarrasch match for the world championship was starting, and the youngster was fortunate enough to observe with his own eyes four games of this historic battle (two of them being *Games No. 53 and 54*). The power of the Lasker intellect created an indelible impression on him ...

In February 1909 a major international congress in memory of Chigorin, who had died a year earlier, was held in St Petersburg. I should remind you that victory in the main tournament was shared by Lasker and Rubinstein, who finished 3½ points ahead of their nearest rivals (although, strangely enough, they both lost to Duz-Khotimirsky!). But the secondary, all-Russian amateur tournament produced a real sensation: it was won by the youngest, 16-year-old participant: 1. Alekhine – 13 out of 16; 2. Rotlewi – 12; 3. Gregory – 11½ etc. Alexander became a master and many saw him as a worthy successor to Chigorin.

In 1910 Alekhine finished school and in the summer he travelled to Hamburg, to the 17th Congress of the German Chess Union, where he played in his first big international tournament: 1. Schlechter – 11½ out of 16; 2. Duras – 11; 3. Nimzowitsch – 10½; 4. Spielmann – 10; 5-6. Marshall and Teichmann – 9½; 7-8. Alekhine and Duz-Khotimirsky – 8½ etc.

A similar result was achieved by the talented 18-year-old master in Carlsbad 1911 (this tournament was overshadowed by San Sebastian, where the 22-year-old Capablanca performed brilliantly): 1. Teichmann – 18 out of 25; 2-3. Rubinstein and Schlechter – 17; 4. Rotlewi – 16; 5-6. Marshall and Nimzowitsch – 15½; 7. Vidmar – 15; 8-11. Alekhine, Duras, Leonhardt and Tartakower – 13½ etc.

After observing the following game, Schlechter, the recent contender for the chess crown, was so captivated by Alekhine's play that he exclaimed: 'This is a future world champion!'

Game 110

A.Alekhine-M.Vidmar

Carlsbad 1911

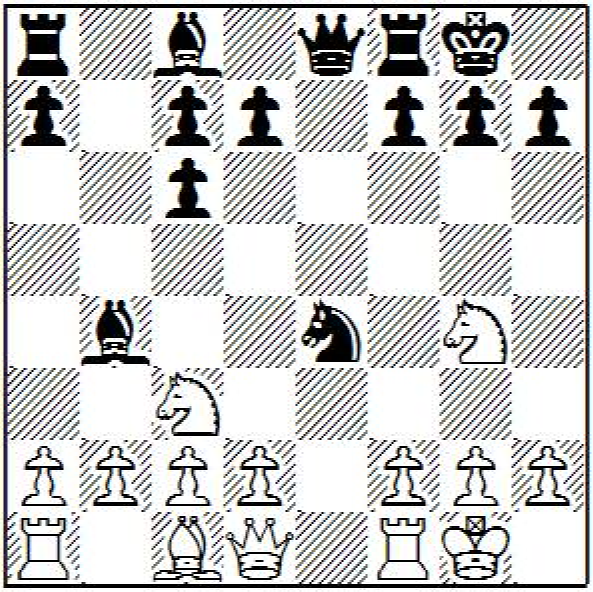
Four Knights Game C49

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 Bb4 5 0-0 0-0 6 Bxc6 (following Nimzowitsch!) **6 ... bxc6?!** (6 ... dxc6 – *Game No.88*) **7 Nxe5 Qe8 8 Ng4**

Typical of Alekhine: his sights are set on the enemy king! After 8 Nd3! White has some advantage thanks to his superior pawn structure.

8 ... Nxe4?

Underestimating the tactical resources. Correct is 8 ... Nxg4 9 Qxg4 d5 10 Qh4 Bxc3 11 bxc3 Qxe4 12 Qxe4 dxe4 with equality.



9 Nh6+! (an unexpected tactical blow!) **9 ... Kh8**

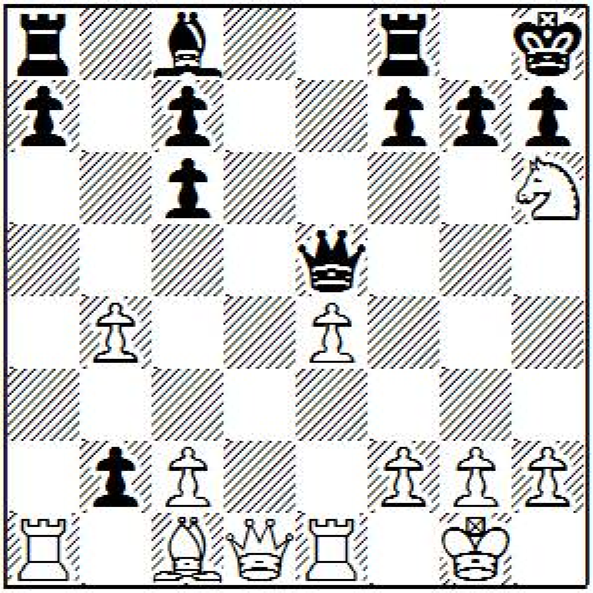
‘It would have been comparatively better for Black to remove the audacious knight, though in that case too White’s game would have remained superior after 10 Qg4+ Kh8 11 Qxe4 Qxe4 12 Nxe4 Be7 13 d3 f5 14 Nc3 f4 15 Re1 followed by Re4.’ (Alekhine)

10 Re1 d5 11 d3 Qe5

11 ... Nxc3 12 bxc3 Be7 did not work on account of 13 Qh5! Be6 14 f4! with the threat of 15 f5 and 16 Ba3!

12 dxe4 d4! 13 a3! dxc3 14 axb4 cxb2

It would appear that with the help of tactical trickery Black has emerged unscathed. But that is not the case!



15 Nxf7+!

‘Equally good was 15 Rb1!? Qe6 (if 15 ... bxc1Q, then 16 Nxf7+! Kg8 17 Nxe5 etc.) 16 Rxb2 gxh6 17 Rb3 and Black cannot hold his h6-pawn. But I did not want to give him counter-chances associated with the open g-file, especially as the move in the game seemed to be simpler and equally certain.’ (Alekhine)

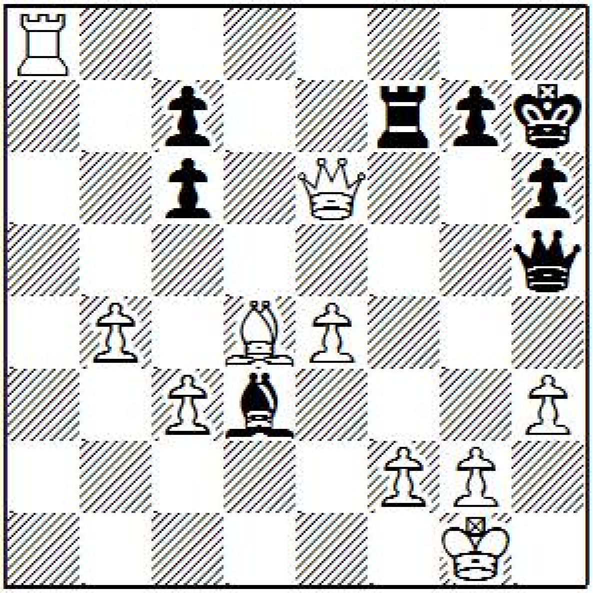
15 ... Kg8 16 Rb1! Rxf7

Even more hopeless was the variation 16 ... bxc1Q 17 Nxe5! Qf4 18 Nd3: White simply has four pawns against two on the kingside.

17 Bxb2 Qg5 18 Qd3 (parrying 18 ... Bh3) **18 ... Be6 19 Bd4!** (with the intention of 20 Ra1) **19 ... Rd8 20 Qe3 Qb5**

If 20 ... Qxe3 21 Bxe3 a6 Alekhine gives 22 Red1 Rfd7 23 Rxd7 Rxd7 24 f3 Kf7 25 Ra1 Bc4 26 Kf2 followed by Ke1, Ra3-c3-c5 and c2-c4 winning.

21 Bxa7 Qa4 22 c3 Bc4 23 Bd4 Ra8 24 Qd2 h6 25 h3 Qb5 (otherwise 26 Qb2 and 27 Ra1) **26 Ra1 Ra4 27 Qc2 Rxa1 28 Rxa1 Bd3 29 Ra8+ Kh7 30 Qa2 Qh5** (30 ... Bc4 31 Qa7 and then Qb8 or Rb8) **31 Qe6!**



31 ... Bf1!

‘Black has no satisfactory defence and so he can without danger indulge in this little pleasantry.’ (Alekhine)

32 Ra5 Qd1 33 Kh2 Bxg2 34 Kxg2 (but not 34 Qxf7?? Qh1+ 35 Kg3 Qxh3+ 36 Kf4 Qf3+ and 37 ... Qxf7) **34 ... Qf3+ 35 Kg1 Rf4 36 Ra8!** (threatening mate with the move Rh8+) **36 ... Rf7 37 Qg4 Qd3 38 Rf8! 1-0**

That same autumn Alekhine moved to St Petersburg, where he entered the Imperial Law School and began writing a chess column in the newspaper *Novoe Vremya*. During the summer holidays of 1912 he won in Stockholm the championship of northern countries: 1. Alekhine – 8½ out of 10; 2. E. Cohn – 7; 3. Marco – 6½; 4. Olland – 5½; 5. Spielmann – 5. The All-Russian master tournament held shortly afterwards in Vilna showed that the youngster was already among the leading players in the country: 1. Rubinstein – 12 out of 18; 2. Bernstein – 11½; 3. Levitzky – 11; 4. Nimzowitsch – 10½; 5. Flamberg – 9; 6-7. Alekhine and Levenfish – 8½ etc.

Early in 1913 Alekhine won a match in St Petersburg against Levitzky (+7 -3) and in the summer a tournament in Scheveningen with 11½ out of 13 (half a point ahead of Janowski). It became clear that a new, bright star had risen in the chess sky. Gradually Alekhine began to conquer the world with his magical combinations, which have already charmed many generations of chess enthusiasts.

Game 111

J.Mieses-A.Alekhine

Scheveningen 1913

Centre Game C22

1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 Qxd4

‘It is quite evident that such displacements of the queen at an early stage in the opening are not likely to reap any advantage. However, Black is compelled to play with precision.’ (Alekhine)

3 ... Nc6 4 Qe3 Be7

‘Black could also have played 4 ... Nf6, for the following variation is mere bluff and eventually turns to Black’s advantage: 5 e5 Ng4 6 Qe4 d5! 7 exd6+ Be6 8 Ba6 (or 8 dxc7 Qd1+!) 8 ... Qxd6 9 Bxb7 Qb4+! 10 Qxb4 Nxb4.’ (Alekhine) And if 5 Nc3, then 5 ... Bb4 or 5 ... Be7, as in the present game.

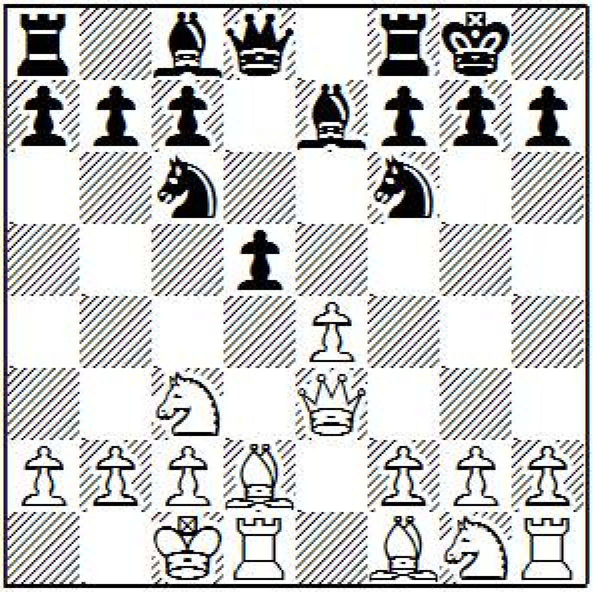
An alternative is 4 ... g6 or 4 ... Bb4+ 5 Nc3 (5 c3 Be7 and ... Nf6) 5 ... Nge7 6 Bd2 0-0 7 0-0-0 d6 8 Qg3 Kh8 9 f4 f5 equalising (Tolush-Botvinnik, 13th USSR Championship, Moscow 1944).

5 Bd2?!

With this move order White has the opportunity for 5 Qg3!? Nf6 6 e5 (but not 6 Qxg7? Rg8 7 Qh6 Rg6 8 Qe3 Nxe4! 9 Bd3 d5) 6 ... Nh5 7 Qe3.

5 ... Nf6 6 Nc3 0-0 (or immediately 6 ... d5!? as in Chigorin-Znosko-Borovsky, St Petersburg 1906) **7 0-0-0 d5!**

This is stronger than 7 ... Re8 (Mason-Chigorin, Paris 1900), to which 8 Bc4 is a good reply. The move in the game, according to Alekhine, ‘will allow Black to extract the maximum return from his advanced development.’

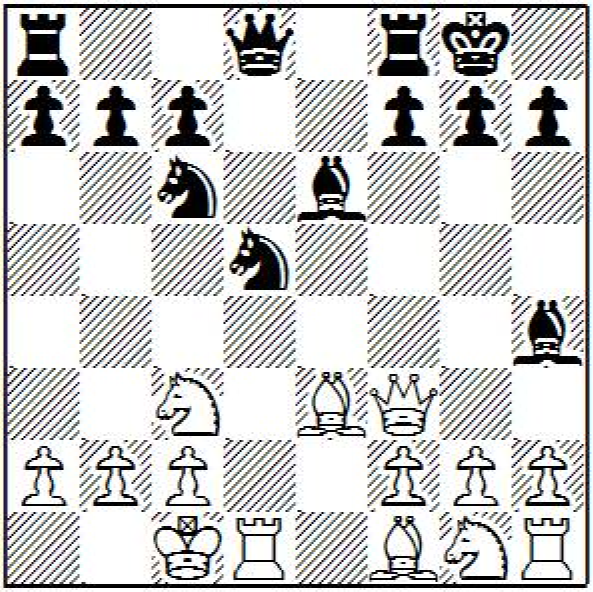


8 exd5 Nxd5 9 Qg3 Bh4! (parrying with gain of tempo the threat of 10 Bh6) **10 Qf3 Be6**

‘The sacrifice initiated by this move is full of promise and on the other hand devoid of risk. It would, however, have been more logical to adopt the following variation: 10 ... Nxc3 11 Bxc3 Qg5+ 12 Bd2 (else 12 ... Bg4) 12 ... Qc5! 13 Be3 Qa5 which would have given Black a dominating position without such complications as defy exact calculation.’ (Alekhine)

11 Be3!

Inferior is 11 Bf4 (11 Kb1? Nd4!) 11 ... Nxc3! 12 Rxd8 Nxa2+ 13 Kb1 Raxd8 14 Bxc7? Rd2 15 c3 Rc8 etc.

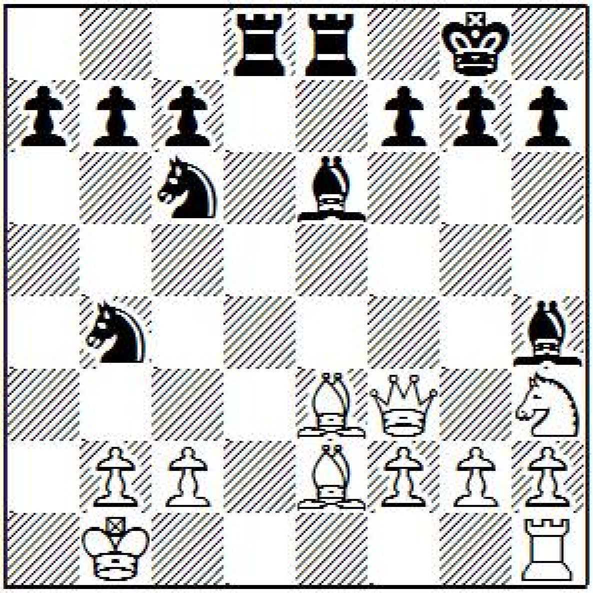


11 ... Nxc3!

‘Much less strong would be 11 ... Ncb4 12 a3 Nxc3 13 Rxd8 Nba2+ 14 Kd2 Nb1+ 15 Ke1, and the two black knights would find themselves in a tragi-comical situation.’ (Alekhine)

12 Rxd8 Nxa2+ 13 Kb1 Raxd8 14 Be2 Nab4 15 Nh3 Rfe8

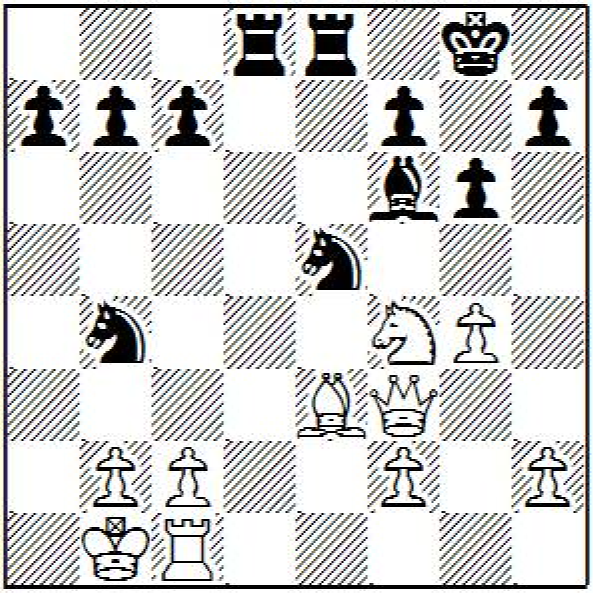
‘Essential as a basis for all the subsequent combinations.’ (Alekhine) In my opinion 15 ... Bd5!? 16 Qg4 Bf6 or the immediate 15 ... Bf6 should also be studied, since the position after the queen sacrifice looks far more promising for Black than the one reached in the game before the 22nd move.



16 Nf4 (if 16 Rd1, then 16 ... Bd5 17 Qh5 Bf6 with the threat of 18 ... Be4 is unpleasant) **16 ... Bf5 17 Rc1 g6?!**

Threatening 18 ... Nxc2 and ... Nb4. If immediately 17 ... Nxc2? 18 Rxc2 Nb4, then 19 Nd3! Be4 20 Nxb4! But even so, 17 ... Nd4! would appear to be more energetic.

18 g4! (to exchange the dangerous bishop) **18 ... Be4 19 Qh3 Bf6** (19 ... Bg5 20 Bf3!) **20 Bf3 Bxf3 21 Qxf3 Ne5**



22 Qe2

Aiming for further simplification by 23 c3 Nbd3 24 Nxd3 Nxd3 25 Rd1.

According to Alekhine, 22 Qxb7!? would have lost due to the combined attack of the f6 bishop and the rook on the b-file. However, after 22 ... Rb8 (22 ... Nxg4 23 Bxa7) 23 Qg2! (23 Qxc7 Nec6!, but 23 Qxa7?! is indeed dangerous because of 23 ... Nc4! 24 c3 Nc6) 23 ... Nc4 24 c3 no good continuation for Black is apparent: 24 ... Nxb2 25 cxb4!, 24 ... Na6 25 Qc6! Rxb2+ 26 Ka1 Reb8 27 Qxc4 R2b5 28 Rc2, or 24 ... Na2 25 Kxa2 Rxb2+ 26 Ka1 etc.

22 ... c5! (in some cases this pawn can support a knight at d3) **23 Rg1**

Simpler is 23 Bxc5 Ned3 24 Qxe8+ Rxe8 25 Nxd3 with equality, but Mieses – with a queen! – is playing for a win: in those times a positional queen sacrifice was something exotic ...

23 ... c4 24 h4 (here 24 g5 Bg7 25 Rd1 would have maintained approximate equality) **24 ... Nd5**

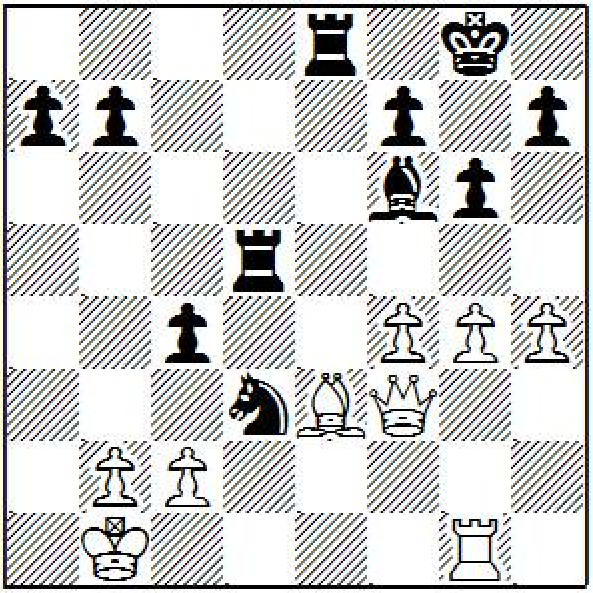
‘The renewed complications resulting from this move required the most exact calculations.’ (Alekhine)

25 Nxd5 Rxd5 26 f4?! (if 26 g5 Bg7 27 Rd1 Black was intending 27 ... Rb5! 28 Bd4 Re6, although after the reply 29 Qf1 with the idea of f2-f4 White has a solid position) **26 ... Nd3!**

Immediately exploiting the fact that the advance with f2-f4 has weakened the e3-bishop’s defences.

27 Qf3?

Alekhine considered it essential to play 27 cxd3 Rxd3 28 Rg3 Bd4! 29 Qc2 (but not 29 Qxd3? cxd3 30 Bxd4 Re1+ 31 Ka2 d2! winning) 29 ... Bxe3 30 Qxc4 Red8 ‘with the better game.’ Although after 31 f5 his advantage is not so obvious. 30 ... Rd4! 31 Qb5 Re7 32 Rf3 b6 would appear to be more accurate, with the idea of gradually invading with the rook into White’s position.



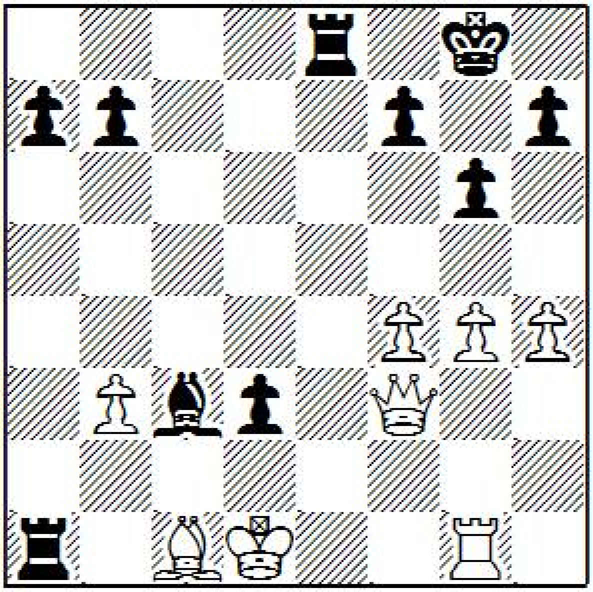
27 ... Rb5!

‘Decisive! Although Black has only a rook for the queen, White is without resource.’ (Alekhine)

28 cxd3

All the same the knight has to be taken. After 28 b3 Ra5! 29 cxd3 in some early edition of Alekhine’s best games the ‘winning’ variation 29 ... cxb3? 30 Kc1? Bc3 31 Kd1 Ra1+ was recommended, but grandmaster John Nunn, armed with the chess program Fritz, refuted it by 30 d4!

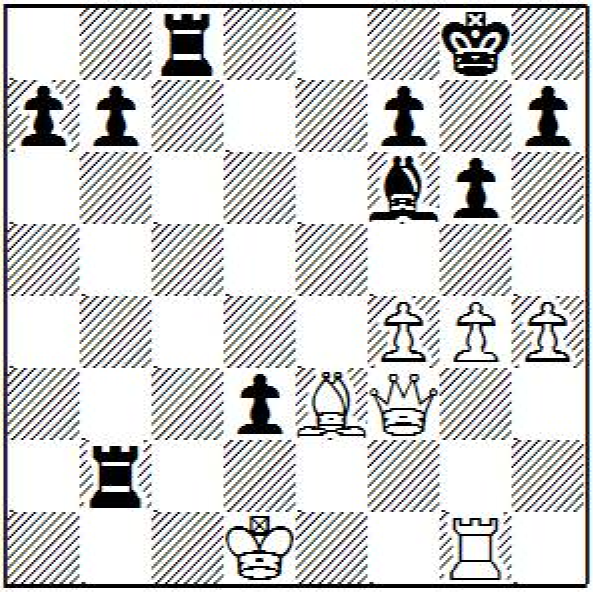
Of course, 29 ... cxd3! 30 Kc1 Bc3 31 Kd1 Ra1+ 32 Bc1 is correct. Nunn showed me this position and invited me to find a pretty win for Black in four moves. The solving of this entertaining little problem took me half a minute ...



Analysis diagram

32 ... Re1+! 33 Rxe1 Rxc1+ 34 Kxc1 d2+ 35 Kc2 (35 Kb1 dxe1Q+ and mate) 35 ... dxe1N+!! A rare instance when the outcome is immediately decided by the promotion of a pawn to a knight!

28 ... Rxb2+ 29 Kc1 cxd3 30 Kd1 (30 Rg2 Rc8+ 31 Kd1 would have merely transposed) **30 ... Rc8!**



31 g5

'Against the threat of 31 ... Rcc2 White's only defence was 31 Rg2. In this case Black would have won as follows: 31 ... Rb1+ 32 Kd2 Rb3 33 Kd1 (33 Ke1 Rc1+! 34 Kf2 – or 34 Bxc1 d2+ – 34 ... Bxh4+ and wins) 33 ... Bc3! 34 Bc1 Bb4! and White is helpless against the threats 35 ... d2 and 35 ... Rb1.' (Alekhine)

31 ... Rcc2! 32 Ke1 Rb1+ 33 Qd1 Bc3+ 0-1

The next all-Russian master tournament (St Petersburg 1913/14), a qualifying event for the historic international tournament, was a fateful event for Alekhine. All the best were playing, apart from the previous year's winners Rubinstein and Bernstein, who were already allowed into the 'high society'. The outcome of the battle for the sole qualifying place was as follows: 1-2. Alekhine and Nimzowitsch – 13½ out of 17; 3. Flamberg – 13; 4. Lowtzky – 11; 5. Levenfish – 10½; 6-7. Znosko-Borovsky and Smorodsky – 10; 8. Bogoljubow – 9½ etc. An additional mini-match between the winners ended in a draw (+1 -1), and both were allowed into the cherished 'tournament of champions' St Petersburg 1914.

Alekhine's performance in this event cannot be praised too highly! After winning in the preliminary tournament against the contender for the throne Rubinstein, and twice defeating Tarrasch in the final, he finished in third place behind the world champion Lasker and the newly-found contender Capablanca. 'The merit of the tournament,' wrote the Russian press, 'is that along with the two world stars it also provided a player for whom Russia is pleased most of all – Alekhine. In his person Russia has acquired a very powerful force, who without fear can embark on further, even more difficult and dangerous battles.' Alas, the most dangerous battles soon broke out beyond the chess board ...

After successfully completing his course at the Law School that same spring, Alexander wondered about whether to play that summer in Mannheim, in the main tournament of the 19th Congress of the German Chess Union. 'He arrived literally two hours before the start of the first round,' recalled a participant in one of the subsidiary tournaments, Pyotr Romanovsky. 'To my question, why had he kept the tournament committee in a state of ignorance for so long, Alekhine replied that he needed to find out whether Capablanca would be playing in the tournament. 'I was prepared to play only in the event of Capablanca not participating,' he explained, and he frankly admitted that within a few years he was intending to play a match with Capablanca for the world championship, and therefore it was very important for him to create around this question a definite public opinion. 'At the moment I am a weaker player than Capablanca, and if he had participated in the tournament he would have taken first prize, and to finish below Capablanca now is not at all in my interests.' 'But the world champion is Lasker, not Capablanca,' I objected. 'But soon it will be Capablanca,' Alekhine replied.'

A profound strategic prediction! And five years later Alekhine stated that 'Lasker will be replaced by Capablanca – it is merely a question of time,' and that he had come to this conclusion after Capa's victory in San Sebastian 1911.

Incidentally, Lasker was guest of honour at the tournament in Mannheim and he made a speech at the opening ceremony. Naturally, Tarrasch also spoke, proposing a toast 'to the world brotherhood of chess.' Virtually 'Gens una sumus' ...

In Mannheim the Russian grandmaster played brilliantly and after two-thirds of the distance he was confidently leading: 1. Alekhine – 9½ out of 11 (!); 2. Vidmar – 8½; 3. Spielmann – 8; 4-6. Breyer, Marshall and Réti – 7; 7. Janowski – 6½; 8-9. Bogoljubow and Tarrasch – 5½ etc. Here is a typical win by the young Alekhine, showing the way in which his style was taking shape. And, incidentally, his last game before the war.

Game 112

A.Alekhine-H.Fahrni

Mannheim 1914, 11th round

French Defence C13

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 h4!?

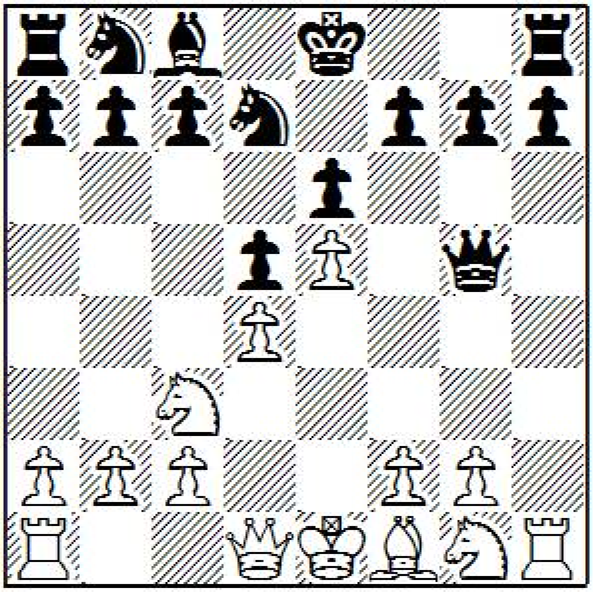
'This energetic move has been especially played in off-hand games by the ingenious French amateur Chatard and previously by the Viennese master Albin. It was during the present game that it was introduced for the first time in a Master Tournament.' (Alekhine) The classical 6 Bxe7 is a quieter alternative (*Game No.50*).

6 ... Bxg5

Also possible is 6 ... 0-0 7 Bd3 f5! (but not 7 ... c5?! 8 Nh3! Re8 9 Nb5 f5 10 Nd6 cxd4 11 Nxe8 Qxe8 12 Bb5! winning Bogoljubow-Spielmann, Vienna 1922) 8 g4! c5 9 gxf5 cxd4 10 f6 Bxf6!, or 6 ... a6 7 Qg4 Bxg5 8 hxg5 (Bogoljubow-Maróczy, San Remo 1930) 8 ... c5! 9 g6 f5!, with sharp play in both cases.

7 hxg5 Qxg5

The *tabiya* of the Alekhine-Chatard Attack.



8 Nh3

Earlier this was played almost automatically, but recently 8 Qd3!? has also appeared – now 8 ... Nc6?! is weak on account of 9 Nf3 Qg6 10 Qxg6 fxg6 11 Nb5! Ke7 (11 ... Kd8 12 Ng5) 12 Nxc7 Rb8 13 Nb5 with an obvious advantage (Kasparov-Korchnoi, Zürich rapidplay 2001).

8 ... Qe7

‘After 8 ... Qh6?! Black’s queen would be in a precarious position.’ (Alekhine) After this theory recommends 9 Nb5! Na6 10 f4 or 9 g3 c6 10 Bd3 g6 11 f4 followed by Qe2 and 0-0-0 (Ryumin-Makogonov, 9th USSR Championship, Moscow 1934).

9 Nf4 Nf8?

Too unwieldy. Later more successful plans were tried:

1) 9 ... a6 10 Qg4 g6 11 0-0-0 Nb6 (11 ... c5?! 12 Qg3! Nb6 – 12 ... cxd4 13 Ncxd5! – 13 dxc5 Qxc5 14 Bd3 Qf8 15 Be4!! dxe4 16 Nxe4 N8d7

17 Qc3! wins, Bogoljubow-Spielmann, Stockholm 1919) 12 Bd3 N8d7 13 Rh6 Nf8 14 Rdh1 Bd7 with a solid position, although White has compensation for the pawn;

2) 9 ... Nc6 10 Qg4!? (if 10 Qd2, then 10 ... b6 or 10 ... Nb6 11 Nh5 f5!? is possible) 10 ... Nxd4 11 0-0-0 Nf5 12 Ncxd5 (the start of wild complications) 12 ... exd5 13 Nxd5 Qxe5 14 Bb5 0-0 15 Bxd7 Nh6 16 Qg3 Qxg3 17 Ne7+ Kh8 18 fxg3 Bxd7 19 Rxd7 Ng4 20 Rxc7 b5 21 Rh4 Nf6 22 Nf5 a6 23 a4 ½-½ (Khalifman-Gulko, Reykjavik 1991).

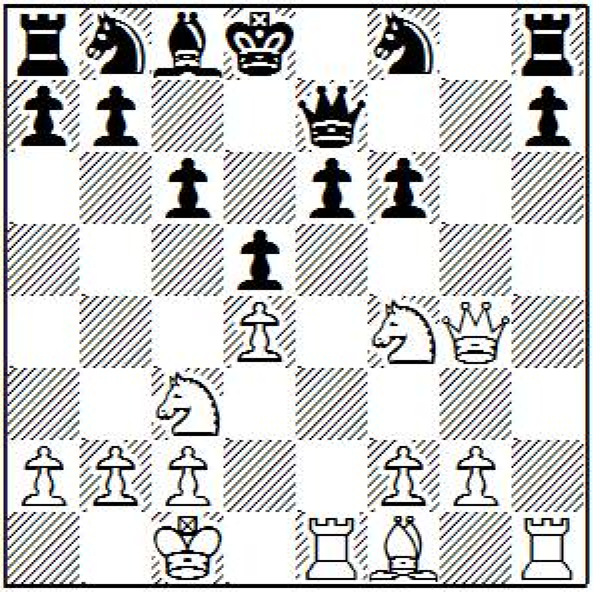
10 Qg4 (with a double threat of 11 Qxg7 and 11 Ncxd5)

10 ... f5 11 exf6 gxf6 12 0-0-0

Renewing the threat of Ncxd5. There is now no doubt that White has a dangerous attack.

12 ... c6 13 Re1! Kd8

The computer makes roughly the same moves. ‘There is no other way to develop the queenside. If 13 ... Bd7 the sacrifice of the knight at d5 would once more be decisive.’ (Alekhine)



14 Rh6! e5 15 Qh4 Nbd7 16 Bd3 (an ideal way of conducting the attack: one of the threats is 17 Bf5) **16 ... e4**

Black should hardly have played this, although for the computer it is ... the first move!

17 Qg3 (again threatening Ncxd5) **17 ... Qf7?**

Almost the decisive mistake. ‘Black cannot play 17 ... Qd6, for after 18 Bxe4! dxe4 19 Rxe4! he would be defenceless against the threat 20 Qg7!’ (Alekhine) However, after 18 ... Rg8! 19 Qh2 dxe4 the position is by no means as clear as in the game, although 20 Rxe4! (20 Nxe4 Qxd4) 20 ... Rg7 21 Ne6+ Qxe6 22 Rxe6 Nxe6 23 d5 leaves White with an attack.

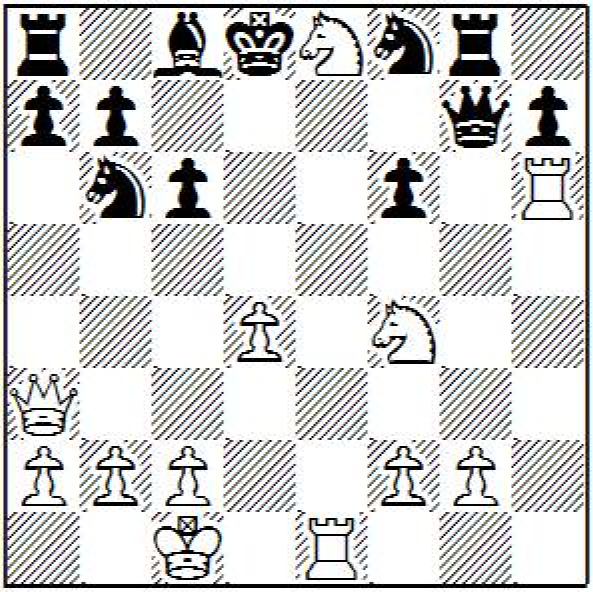
18 Bxe4! dxe4? (18 ... Rg8! 19 Bxd5 cxd5 20 Qf3 etc. was nevertheless more tenacious) **19 Nxe4 Rg8**

Now this is too late. ‘If 19 ... Qxa2 20 Nxf6! Nxf6 21 Qg7! and wins.’ (Alekhine) For example: 21 ... Qa1+ 22 Kd2 Qa5+ 23 c3 N6d7 24 Qe7+ Kc7 25 Qd6+ Kd8 (25 ... Kb6 26 Nd5+) 26 Rhe6!.

20 Qa3! (accuracy to the end; 20 Nd6?! Qxa2 is unclear) **20 ... Qg7**

Or 20 ... Qe7 21 Qa5+ b6 22 Qc3 winning.

21 Nd6! Nb6 22 Ne8!



22 ... Qf7 (22 ... Qd7 23 Nxf6; 22 ... Nc4 23 Qc5 Qf7 24 Rxf6) **23 Qd6+ 1-0**

23 ... Qd7 24 Qxf6+ and mate. A clear, clean attack!

To enormous regret, on 1st August the First World War began. The tournament was cut short, and the organisers hastily distributed the prize fund in accordance with the placing of the participants at that moment ...

In the Whirlwind of Wars and Revolutions

The First World War abruptly changed Alekhine’s hitherto successful life. The misadventures of Russian chess players, and there were more than a dozen of them in Mannheim, began immediately after the cessation of the tournament, when they were all taken to a police station. Most were ordered not to travel and to wait until further notice, but Alexander was detained: because of a photograph that had been taken with him wearing the uniform of the Law School, he was taken for an officer. According to a witness, ‘this misunderstanding cost Alekhine a night, spent in the barracks.’

Germany was instantly enveloped by a mass spy-mania and the Russians felt most uncomfortable. Three days later ‘as a special exception’ they were allowed to travel to Baden-Baden, to settle there in private quarters and to await further orders. But on the train the conductor played a cruel trick on them: he told them that they had to change in Rastadt, and he himself telephoned the military commandant of that town (a mobilisation centre in Southern Germany) and informed him of a suspicious group of foreigners ...

‘As soon as we stepped out of the carriage,’ recalls Fedor Bohatirchuk, a participant in one of the subsidiary tournaments, ‘we were surrounded by virtually a company of fully armed soldiers, and we were arrested. In the station building they thoroughly searched us and our luggage and triumphantly discovered score sheets with the recordings of chess games, taken by the zealous spy-hunters to be obviously code for the transmission of spy messages. The hour was late and, before any verdict was reached, we were taken to a military prison – we were lined up, each was forced to carry his own luggage, and surrounded by a cordon of soldiers, we set off ... The population of the small town, on learning that some spies had been caught, poured out onto the street along which we were being led, and expressed their anger in every way possible. The most bellicose demanded immediate retribution on the spot, others broke through the cordon and expressed their feelings with their fists. Poor Selezniev could hardly drag a large basket with warm clothes, provided by his compassionate mother, and this not only delayed us, but also increased the number of blows we received. They also struck Alekhine, who stood out with his bearing and height.’

The military authorities quickly sorted out who was whom, but, to save face they continued their ‘investigations’ and put the chess players in a civil prison. There Alekhine shared a cell with Bogoljubow, Ilya Rabinovich and Samuil Vainstein. ‘Life in prison was rather monotonous,’ he later recalled. ‘There were no books, no newspapers and, of course, no chessboard. Bogoljubow and I played blindfold chess for hours. Our battles were interrupted when for four days I was placed in solitary confinement, for the reason that during a communal walk (in the obligatory goose-step) I once ventured to smile ... ’ More precisely, Alekhine exchanged glances with the pretty daughter of the warder, and the latter did not like this ...

Within a couple of weeks the prisoners were finally sent to Baden-Baden, where a further two weeks later they had to pass through a military medical commission, in order to establish which of them were potentially dangerous to Germany. Only three were lucky, as being deemed unfit for military service: on 14th September they released Alekhine, and three days later – Saburov and Bohatirchuk. ‘I did not believe my eyes, on seeing the conclusion of the commission, by which I was sent “for treatment” to Switzerland,’ writes Bohatirchuk. ‘Saburov was elderly and not in very good health, but why they freed the healthy Alekhine, I cannot imagine. I can only think that the doctor who examined him was an admirer of Alekhine’s chess genius. I should mention that among those not released were Bogoljubow and Selezniev, who had both been released from military service in Russia.’ Together with the remaining players they were interned in Triberg, and this changed Bogoljubow’s fate: he married the daughter of a local school teacher and although he visited his motherland in 1924-26, in the end he became a German citizen.

But Alekhine left for Switzerland, and from there to Genoa – this Italian port had become a collecting point for Russians who were stuck in Europe. In the press a fantastic rumour appeared, to the effect that ‘the winner of the tournament in Mannheim was intending to travel to Buenos Aires and to play numerous games there with Capablanca.’ In fact Alekhine played numerous games (several hundred!) with Bohatirchuk, who also sat in Genoa for about a month, waiting for a boat. The latter later recalled:

‘There was no question of being bored: I had a partner, and what a partner – Alekhine! Only someone who has played this chess genius knows what a magician he was on the 64 squares of the chessboard. In his hands the pieces were transformed into living creatures, making moves that were completely unexpected to his opponents. Moreover, these surprises would strike the enemy like a bolt from the blue in any stage of the game, even when there were very few pieces remaining. The enforced stay in Genoa undoubtedly did more for my chess development than the games in subsequent years with ordinary opponents.'

In mid-October Alekhine finally left for his motherland by a northern route: via Gibraltar, London, Stockholm (where he found time to give a simultaneous display on 24 boards) and Finland – to St Petersburg, which had now been renamed Petrograd, and then to Moscow. From November 1914 he was already playing numerous consultation games and giving charitable simultaneous displays, which included some for the benefit of Romanovsky and other chess-playing colleagues who were still imprisoned in Triberg.

Relating to this period is one of the mysteries of chess history, a legendary game, either in fact played, or thought up by the future world champion. But in any case it is a wonderful demonstration of Alekhine's impetuous, boundless imagination.

Game 113

A.Alekhine-N.N.

Moscow 1915

French Defence C12

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4

The sharp McCutcheon counterattack, which Alekhine was much happier playing as Black.

5 e5

The popular reply to 5 exd5 is the 'French' 5 ... Qxd5!? (5 ... exd5 is not so good as in the variation 3 ... Bb4 4 exd5 exd5 5 Bd3 Nc6 6 Ne2 Nge7 7 0-0 Bf5 equalising, Capablanca-Alekhine, Buenos Aires 1st matchgame 1927) 6 Bxf6 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 gxf6 8 Qd2! (8 Nf3 b6 is equal, Tarrasch-Alekhine, St Petersburg 1914) 8 ... Qa5! (8 ... c5 9 Qe3!, 8 ... Bd7 9 c4! or 8 ... Nd7 9 c4! Qe4+ 10 Ne2 Capablanca-Alekhine, New York 1924) followed by ... Bd7-c6, ... Nd7 and ... 0-0-0 (the fashion of the 1990s).

5 ... h6 6 exf6

'Chigorin's interesting continuation. Nowadays players prefer to aim at a rapid kingside attack by 6 Bd2! Bxc3 7 bxc3 Ne4 8 Qg4.' (Alekhine) This, the main line, extends from the ancient game Lasker-Marshall, (USA

4th matchgame 1907) to the classic duel Fischer-Rossolimo (USA Championship 1965/66) and to the present day.

6 ... hxg5 7 fxg7 Rg8 8 h4 gxh4 9 Qg4!?

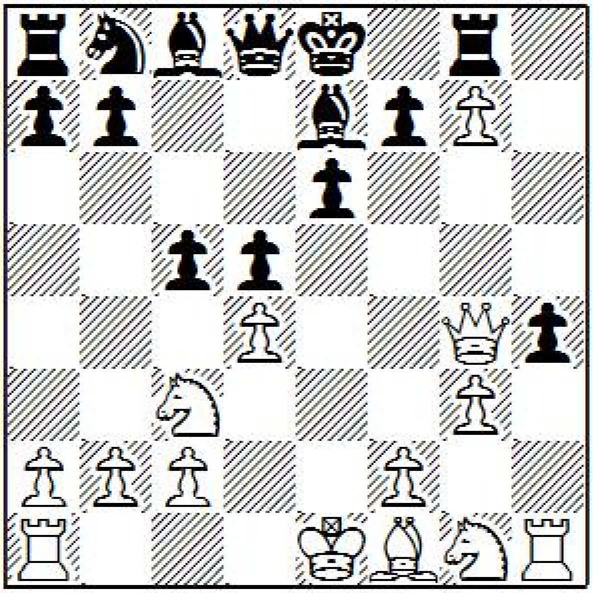
An attempt to improve on the variation 9 Qh5 Qf6 10 Nf3 (10 Qxh4 Qxg7) 10 ... Nc6! 11 Rxh4 Qxg7 12 0-0-0 Bd7 and 13 ... 0-0-0 with equality.

9 ... Be7

‘The only correct reply. After 9 ... Qf6 10 Rxh4 Qxg7 11 Qxg7 Rxg7 12 Rh8+ Kd7 13 Nf3 White has the better chances.’ (Alekhine) Excuse me, but after 12 ... Bf8! 13 0-0-0 (13 Nb5 Na6 14 Nf3 f6 15 Nh4 Nb4!) 13 ... Bd7 Black completes his development and easily equalises (Heuer-Dvoretsky, Tallinn 1976).

10 g3! (threatening to create another passed pawn) **10 ... c5**

Of course, not 10 ... hxg3? on account of 11 Rh8. Also in White’s favour is 10 ... Bf6 11 gxh4 Rxg7 12 Qf4!



11 gxh4

The start of the legend. The well-known game Grigoriev-Alekhine (Moscow 1915/16) went 11 0-0-0 Nc6 12 dxc5 Qa5! 13 Kb1 e5? (13 ... Bf6 14 Nb5 Ke7! and ... Rxg7 would have given Black the better chances) 14 Qh5 Be6 15 Nxd5? (correct was 15 Bh3! Bxh3 16 Nxh3 d4 17 Nd5 with advantage) 15 ... Bxd5 16 Rxd5 Nb4! and Black won by a direct attack on the king.

Annotating the game with Grigoriev in the magazine *Shakhmatny Vestnik* (1916), Alekhine writes: ‘If 11 gxh4 I was intending to play 11 ... Bf6, since 11 ... cxd4 leads to complications that are very hard to calculate. Here, for example, is one of the possible fantastic variations.’ And he goes on to give all the moves of the game with N.N., right up to 24 Rh6!!

But in his book of best games (1927) Alekhine writes: ‘A game played by the author in Moscow, 1915, continued as follows ... ’ – and he gives the same moves, accompanying them with a light commentary.

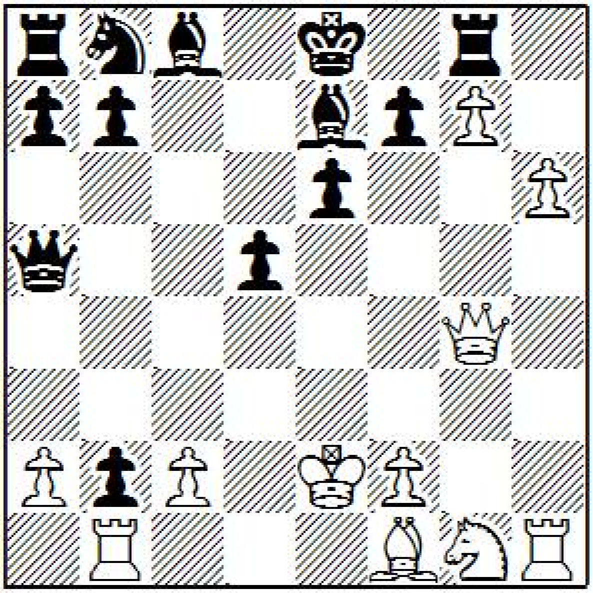
In any case, we have the happy opportunity of enjoying the fairy-tale final position.

11 ... cxd4

11 ... Bf6!? was indeed more prudent. However, as we will see, things are by no means so bad for Black.

12 h5! dxc3 13 h6 cxb2 14 Rb1 Qa5+ 15 Ke2

An important moment, which up till now has been skipped over by all the analysts. But not the computer!



15 ... Qxa2?

In my opinion, 15 ... Bf8!! would have destroyed White’s entire set-up. For example: 16 h7 Rxg7 17 Qd4 Rxh7 18 Rxh7 Qxa2 19 Rxb2 Qa6+

20 Ke1 Qa1+ 21 Ke2 Nd7 22 Nf3 b6 with three pawns for the exchange, or 16 gxf8Q+ Rxf8 17 Rxb2 Qc3 (17 ... Nc6!?), and here 18 Qg7 d4! 19 Qxf8+? Kxf8 20 h7 d3+! 21 Kd1 Qh8 is bad for White, while after 18 Qb4 Qf6! 19 Ke1 Rh8 Black retains his extra material and winning chances.

16 h7 Qxb1 17 hxg8Q+ Kd7 18 Qxf7 Qxc2+ 19 Kf3 Nc6!

‘Only in this way can Black combat the veritable brigade of White queens. The knight move enables him to simultaneously defend both bishops.’ (Kotov)

20 Qgxe6+

Another important refinement: In my view, 20 g8Q! is much simpler, for example: 21 ... Ne5+ 21 Kg2 Nxf7 22 Qxf7 Kc6 23 Qe8+ Kb6 24 Qd4+ with a forced win, or 20 ... Qe4+ 21 Qxe4 dxe4+ 22 Kg2 b1Q 23 Qxe6+ Kc7 24 Qg3+ Kb6 25 Qd5 also with a decisive advantage.

20 ... Kc7 21 Qf4+ Kb6 22 Qee3+ Bc5

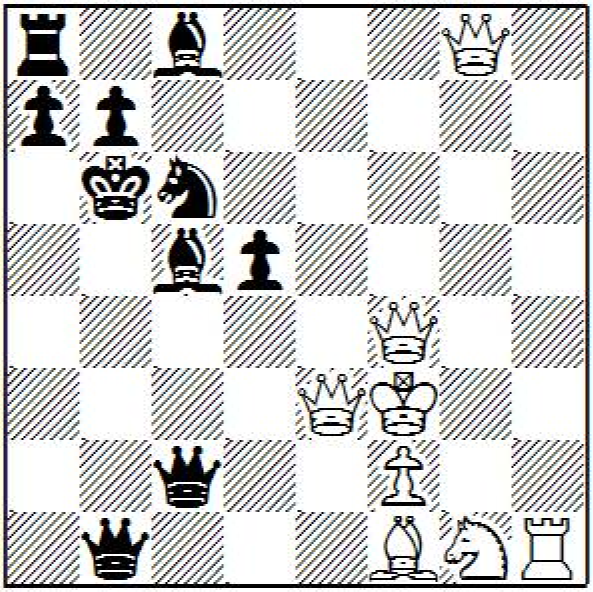
‘Other moves lose immediately: 22 ... d4 23 Bd3! or 22 ... Ka5 23 Qd2+.’ (Kotov)

23 g8Q!

After 23 Bd3 Bxe3 24 Qxe3+?! (24 Bxc2 Bxf4 25 g8Q is evidently better) 24 ... d4 25 Bxc2 dxe3 26 g8Q (26 Rh8? Nd4+) 26 ... Bg4+! 27 Qxg4 Ne5+ 28 Kg3 Nxg4 29 Kxg4 Rh8! 30 Nh3 Rc8 White could have been left empty-handed.

23 ... b1Q

‘In the event of 23 ... Bxe3 24 Qxe3+ hopeless for Black are both 24 ... d4 25 Qeb3+ and 24 ... Kc7 (24 ... Ka5 25 Qxd5+) 25 Qg3+!, when the two queens mate the black king without difficulty.’ (Kotov)



Fantastic: there are five queens on the board! In the famous finish to the 11th game of the Capablanca-Alekhine match there were ‘only’ four (*Game No.125*).

‘In this extraordinary position White won by a *coup de repos*: **24 Rh6!!** (threatening 25 Qd8 mate), for if 24 ... Bxe3?, then 25 Qd8+ Kc5 26 Qfd6+ Kd4 27 Q8f6+ and mate. 24 ... Qxf1? is also not possible on account of 25 Qb4+ Kc7 (25 ... Qb5 26 Qd8+ Ka6 27 Qea3+ and mate in two moves) 26 Qg3+ with mate in a few moves.’ (Alekhine) Or 24 ... Qe4+ 25 Qexe4 dxe4+ 26 Kg3! Qxf1 27 Qb3+ with an attack and a material advantage.

The computer shows that Alekhine’s move 24 Rh6!! was indeed the strongest. But 60 years after the mythical game the best defence for Black was found by grandmaster Timman: 24 ... Bg4+! 25 Qgxg4 Bxe3 26 Qb4+?! Qxb4 27 Qxb4+ Kc7 and White has only perpetual check (28 Qe7+ etc.). However, in my view, here too after 26 Qxe3+! Qc5 27 Qgf4 he retains a considerable advantage.

It is hard to convey how difficult these wartime years must have been for Alekhine: there were the premature deaths of his parents (his father spent more than a year in a German prison) and work at the front as a Red Cross (according to another version, Union of Cities) official – rescuing the wounded under artillery fire, serious concussion, the military hospital in Tarnopol ...

‘For a whole month I lay immobile, bed-ridden,’ Alekhine recalled. ‘For me at that time playing blindfold was a real godsend. At my request I was often visited by local players, and I would give small simultaneous displays without looking at the board. It was in one such display that my best known blindfold game was played – against Feldt.’ (Historians believe that this was the pseudonym of one of the Tarnopol medical staff.)

Game 114

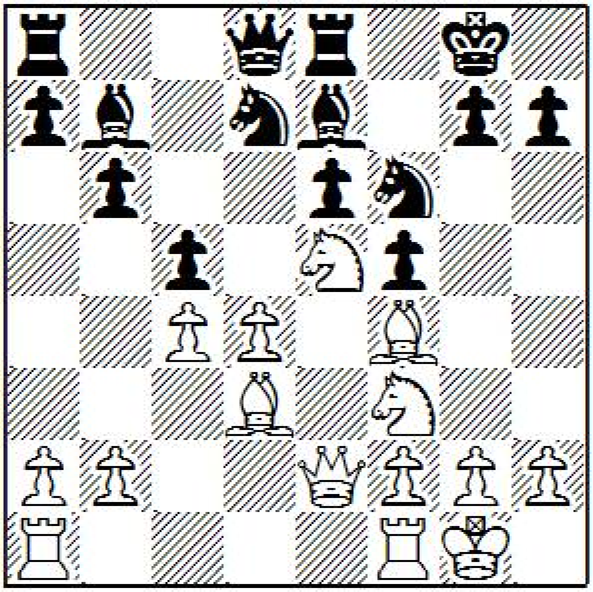
A.Alekhine-M.Feldt

Blindfold simultaneous display, Tarnopol 1916

French Defence C11

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 exd5 (4 Bg5! – *Game No.113*) **4 ... Nxd5 5 Ne4! f5? 6 Ng5! Be7 7 N5f3 c6 8 Ne5 0-0 9 Ngf3 b6 10 Bd3 Bb7 11 0-0 Re8?!** (11 ... c5) **12 c4 Nf6 13 Bf4 Nbd7 14 Qe2 c5?**

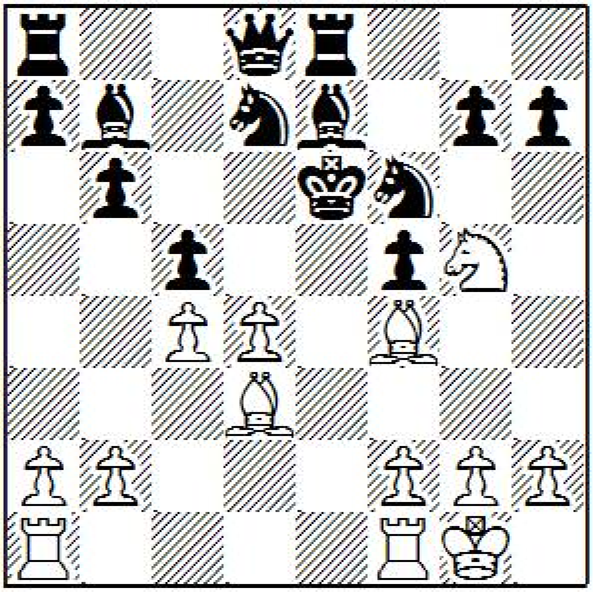
14 ... Nf8 or 14 ... Bf8 was essential, but who could have known ...



15 Nf7!! (there’s a surprise!) **15 ... Kxf7**

After 15 ... Qc8 16 Qxe6 the threat of 17 Nh6+ Kh8 18 Qg8+! and Nf7 mate wins.

16 Qxe6+! Kg6 (16 ... Kxe6 17 Ng5 mate!



Analysis diagram

or 16 ... Kf8 17 Ng5!) **17 g4! Be4 18 Nh4 mate**

After leaving hospital, Alekhine returned to Moscow, where for his exploits at the front he was awarded the Order of St Stanislav and two George Medals.

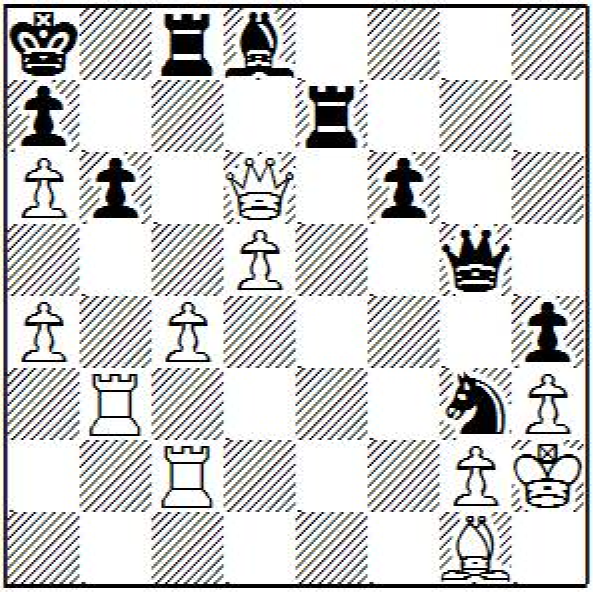
Then came the ominous year 1917 – the year of tragic revolutionary shocks. Alekhine rushed about Russia from town to town, as though not knowing where to make for: he gave simultaneous displays, normal and blindfold, he played consultation and exhibition games ...

The following finish is another vivid demonstration of his restless, explosive style of play. That same style and approach to chess, which later was incomprehensible to Fischer, with his classically clear, rational chess thinking.

Game 115

A.Alekhine-M.Hofmeister

Petrograd 1917



31 c5!

The only chance in an almost hopeless situation. Unfathomable complications now ensue.

31 ... b5?

The attempt to give perpetual check – 31 ... Nf1+? 32 Kh1 Ng3+ is refuted by 33 Rxg3! Qxg3 34 cxb6!, for example: 34 ... Rxc2 (34 ... Rec7 35 Rxc7; 34 ... Rb8 35 b7+) 35 Qxd8+ Qb8 36 Qxe7 axb6 37 d6 winning, or 34 ... Qxd6 35 Rxc8+ Qb8 36 b7+ Rxb7 37 axb7+ Kxb7 38 Rxb8+ Kxb8 39 Bf2 and matters are decided by the extra pawn.

However, as the computer confirms, Black had two ways to at least avoid being crushed:

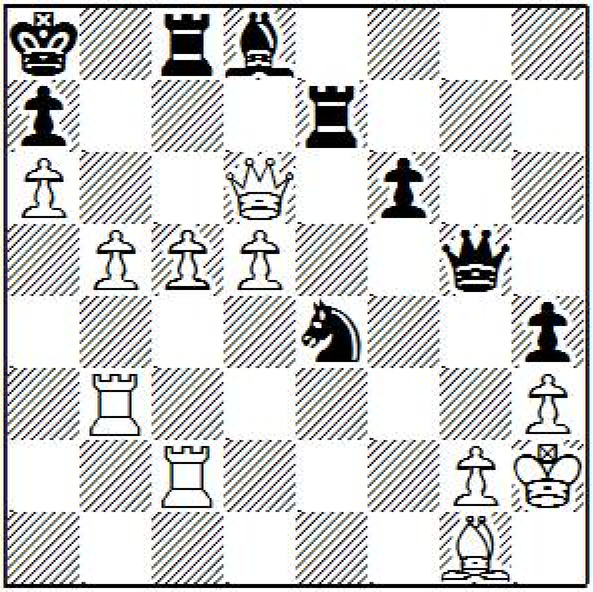
1) 31 ... Ne4 32 cxb6! Qxg2+! (found in the early 70s by some East German players) 33 Rxg2 Nxd6 34 b7+ (34 a5!? Rd7 35 Rgb2 Rb8 36 Be3 axb6 37 axb6 Bxb6 38 Rxb6 Rxb6 39 Bxb6 Nc4 with level chances) 34 ... Nxb7 35 axb7+ Rxb7 36 Rxb7 Kxb7 37 Rg7+ Rc7 38 Rxc7+ Bxc7+ 39 Kg2 Bb6 40 Bh2 Ka6 41 Kf3 Ka5 42 Kg4 Kxa4 43 d6 a5 44 Kf5 Kb3, or 38 Rg4!? Rc2+ 39 Kh1 Bb6! 40 Bxb6 Kxb6 41 Rxh4 Kc5 42 Rf4 Ra2 43 d6 Kxd6 44 Rxf6+ Ke5 45 Ra6 Kf4 with a draw in each instance;

2) 31 ... Re2! (with the threat of ... Nf1+) 32 Rxe2 Nxe2 33 Qd7 (33 cxb6 Bxb6 wins for Black) 33 ... Qe5+ 34 Kh1 Qc7 35 Qxc7 (inferior is 35 Qe6? Ng3+ 36 Rxg3 hxg3 37 c6 Kb8) 35 ... Rxc7! (stronger than 35 ... Bxc7 36 d6 Bd8 and than 36 ... bxc5? 37 dxc7 Nxg1?? 38 Rd3!, although 37 ... Ng3+ 38 Kh2 Nf1+ still gives perpetual check) 36 c6 Ng3+ 37 Kh2 Rc8 with an extra piece and winning prospects.

After missing these possibilities, Hofmeister perishes under the pawn avalanche.

32 axb5 Ne4

Black loses picturesquely after 32 ... Nf1+ (32 ... Re2 33 Rxe2 Nxe2 34 b6!) 33 Kh1 Ng3+ 34 Rxg3 Qxg3 35 b6! Qxd6 (or 35 ... axb6 36 cxb6 Qxd6 37 Rxc8+ Qb8 38 b7+ Rxb7 39 axb7+ Kxb7 40 Rxb8+ Kxb8 41 Bc5) 36 cxd6 Rxc2 37 dxe7 Bxe7 38 b7+ Kb8 39 Bh2+ Rc7 40 Bf4! Bc5 41 g3! hxg3 42 h4 Bd4 43 Bxc7+ Kxc7 44 d6+ Kb8 45 d7 Bb6 46 h5 and wins.



33 b6!

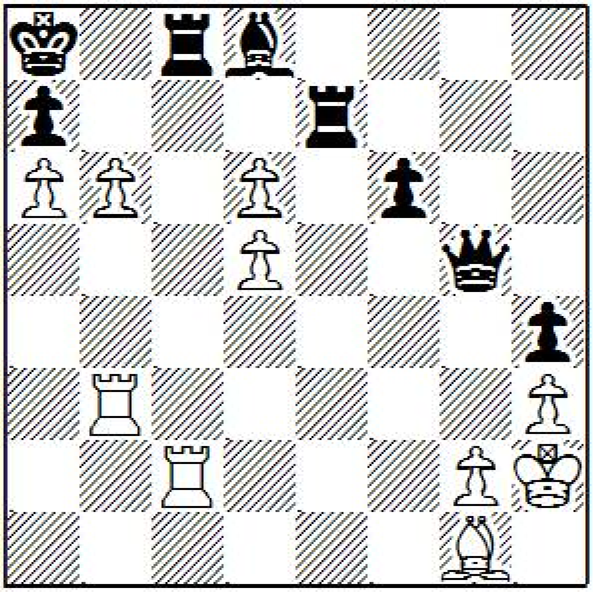
‘The queen and the rooks don’t matter! The outcome is decided by the white pawns.’ (Kotov)

33 ... Nxd6

Also after the desperate 33 ... axb6 34 cxb6 Qxg2+!? 35 Rxg2 Nxd6 36 b7+ Nxb7 37 axb7+ Rxb7 38 Ra2+ Kb8 39 Ba7+ Ka8 (39 ... Kc7 40 Rc2+ Kd6 41 Rxc8 Rxb3 42 Rxd8+) 40 Rba3! White still wins.

34 cxd6

This is not something that one sees every day:



34 ... Rec7

What else?! The white pawns are irresistible! In confirmation Alekhine gives the following variations:

1) 34 ... Rxc2 35 b7+ Rxb7 36 axb7+ Kb8 37 Bxa7+ and mate follows in two more moves;

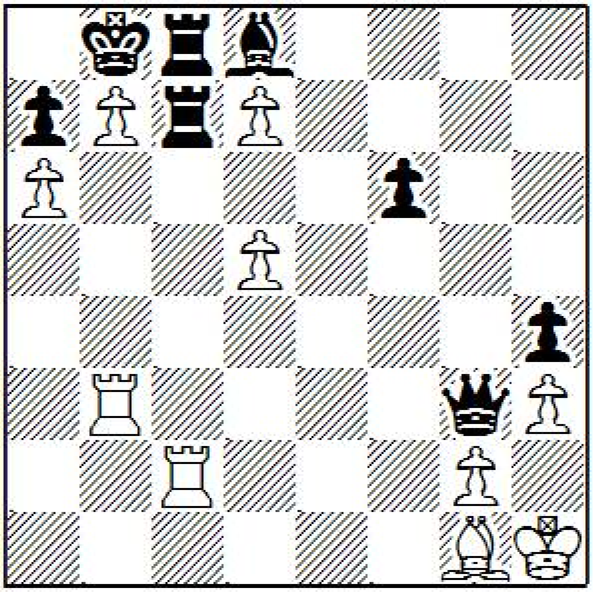
2) 34 ... Rb8 35 b7+ and mate in three moves;

3) 34 ... axb6 35 Rxc8+ Ka7 36 dxe7 and wins (36 ... Qf4+ 37 Kh1 Bxe7 38 Bxb6+ Kxa6 39 Ra8+ Kb7 40 Be3+ Kotov);

4) 34 ... Bc7! 35 b7+! Kb8 36 dxc7+ Rexc7 (36 ... Rcxc7? 37 Bxa7+) 37 Rxc7! etc. That is, 37 ... Qe5+ 38 Kh1! Qxc7 39 Bh2, or 37 ... Rg8 38 Rc2. I should like to add 36 Kh1!? Rce8 37 dxe7 Qxd5 38 Rxc7 Kxc7 39 b8Q+ Rxb8 40 Rxb8 winning.

35 b7+ Kb8 36 d7!! Qg3+ 37 Kh1 1-0

‘An incredible position. It represents the ultimate triumph of mind over matter – the two white pawns on d7 and b7 conquer the black army, which has in its ranks a whole queen more.’ (Kotov) (The moves in this game have been numbered arbitrarily: its beginning is not known.)



After the Bolsheviks seized power, the position of Alekhine, with his noble origins, became more than precarious. After losing what remained of his parents’ fortune, he was obliged to think every day about how to earn his living. In Moscow hunger and cold prevailed and there was no time for chess, but nearer to the summer of 1918 a small three-cycle match-tournament nevertheless took place: 1. Alekhine – 4½ out of 6; 2. Nenarokov – 3½; 3. A. Rabinovich – 1.

In the autumn Alexander made a dangerous trip to the south – to Kiev and Odessa. The civil war was at its height, and many towns were constantly changing hands ... In Odessa a tournament was planned with the participation of some local masters – Verlinsky, Vilner and others, but Alekhine’s main aim was to travel abroad by boat. However, the tournament did not take place, it was not possible to obtain a ticket on a boat, and Alekhine was stuck in Odessa until spring 1919. The terrible situation at the time was described by Ivan Bunin in his narrative diary *Cursed Days* and by Sergey Melgunov in his book *The Red Terror in Russia 1918-1920*. Everywhere there were mass arrests and shootings ...

What happened next is related by Bohatirchuk, from the words of Yakov Vilner, who was working in the Odessa military tribunal: ‘Alekhine was faced with the problems of how to survive and how not to lose hopes of becoming world chess champion. Some admirer of his chess genius found him work in the safest place – in the commission for confiscating valuables from the bourgeoisie! To work in the commission you had to join the communist party, which Alekhine did ... ’ But he could not escape his fate: he was nevertheless arrested by the secret police – apparently, due to someone informing against him – and sentenced to be shot. However, literally a couple of hours before the sentence was carried out, Vilner managed to contact the Ukrainian Chief Commissar Khristian Rakovsky, who gave the order to free Alekhine (according to another version, he was saved by the Agriculture Commissar Dmitry Manuilsky, with whose consent Alekhine was living in Odessa).

After returning in the summer to Moscow, Alekhine was ready to give up chess and enter the State School of Cinematography. Fortunately for us, nothing came of this: at the end of 1919 he gave up acting and ... travelled to Kharkov, where his elder brother Alexey was then living. He worked in the office of a military sanatorium, in the winter caught typhus (also a sign of the times!) and in May 1920 again returned to Moscow. Here, as a qualified lawyer, he at last found work in his speciality – as an investigator for the police central investigation department (this organisation helped people who had lost one another during the War).

Chess also staked its claim: Alekhine happily visited the ‘club’ apartment in block No.23 on Prechistensky (Gogolevsky) Boulevard, opposite the present Central Chess Club.

On one occasion Alekhine was demonstrating his game with Duras from Mannheim 1914, and someone asked him how he rated Duras’s strength. ‘Of course, he is a very strong player,’ Alekhine replied, ‘but when he is playing me, I always know what he is thinking about. But when I play Lasker or Capablanca, I have absolutely no idea what they are thinking about. Many of their moves are a revelation to me ... ’ A highly interesting admission by the young grandmaster!

At that same time he took an active part in the organisation of the first championship of Soviet Russia (Moscow, October 1920) and he brilliantly won his tournament (which was quite strong, despite the absence of Rubinstein, Nimzowitsch, Bernstein, Bogoljubow and Znosko-Borovsky, who had ended up abroad): 1. Alekhine – 12 out of 15 (undefeated); 2. Romanovsky – 11; 3. Levenfish – 10; 4. I. Rabinovich – 9½ etc.

It need hardly be said what it was like to play for 20 days in a tournament, which took place on a background of general hunger and destruction. An unheated, poorly-lit room, problems with meals, and everything somehow barren. At the height of the battle, seven of the players demanded an increase in the bread ration and an immediate issue of cheese and cigarettes ... Alekhine supported his colleagues, declaring that he did not consider it possible to play ‘hungry opponents’. The participants’ protest was largely satisfied, and it proved possible to finish the tournament.

Meanwhile in November the Moscow secret police, after receiving a signal from their Odessa branch, brought a new case against Alekhine. Fortunately, early in 1921, after a very detailed interrogation of the suspect, the charges of ‘anti-Soviet activity’ were dropped.

The Campaign for the Crown

The first ‘championship of the Soviets’ turned out to be Alekhine’s last tournament in Russia. He had not given up his life’s dream – to fight for the world crown.

In those difficult conditions in which he was living, the further development of his mastery was impossible, and in addition he needed to play in strong international tournaments. But the authorities persistently refused him permission to travel abroad. And Alekhine racked his brains: how to escape from Russia?! (In another turn of chess history, in the mid-1970s, Korchnoi found himself in a similar situation.)

He was helped by an accident. In the summer of 1920 Alekhine was transferred from the central investigation department to Comintern, where he worked as an interpreter, since he had an excellent command of French and German. He became a candidate member of the Communist Party (although Bohatirchuk writes that Alekhine showed him his Odessa party ticket back in 1919), and in the autumn he met the 41-year-old Swiss woman Annaliese Rüegg, who had come to Russia as a delegate to the 3rd International. And on 15 March 1921 (the day that the Lasker-Capablanca match in Havana began!) they were married. Annaliese was already expecting a baby and, naturally, wanted to have the birth at home, with the moral support of her husband. In view of this, in the words of Bohatirchuk, ‘the persistent lady delegate obtained a reception with Lenin himself,’ or in another version – with Karl Radek, who is supposed to have said: ‘Alekhine may be a counter-revolutionary, but in chess he is a genius. He can display this gift only outside of Russia ... ’ At any event, Alekhine received permission to leave, by a mystical coincidence, on 29th April, immediately after news had arrived from Havana about Capablanca's victory.

The newly-weds travelled via Latvia to Berlin and soon parted: Annaliese returned to her native Switzerland, where she safely gave birth to a son and concerned herself with his upbringing (without interrupting her political activity!), while Alexander set off on his long campaign for the world chess crown. He did not then know that he would never seen his native land again ... But he periodically visited his son and after the death of Annaliese in 1934 he placed him in a good boarding-house, under the guardianship of the Swiss master Voellmy.

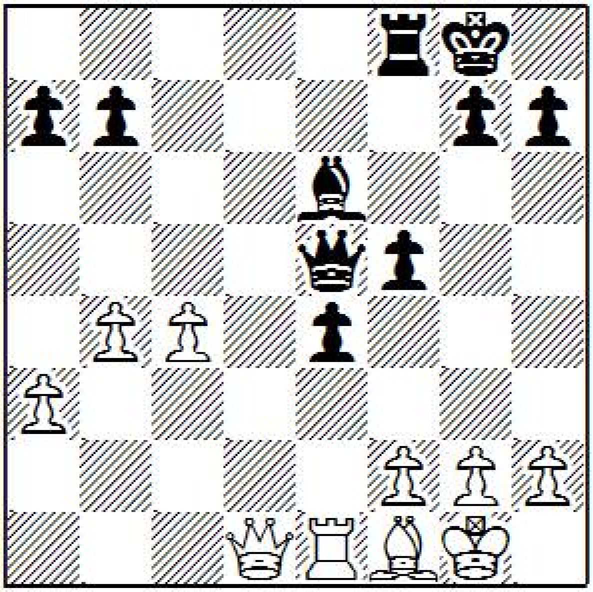
During the remaining half of 1921 Alekhine found time to play mini-matches in Berlin with Teichmann (+2 -2 =2) and Sämisch (+2), write his first book *Shakhmatnaya zhinzn v Sovetskoi Rossii* (Chess Life in Soviet Russia) and to win three tournaments in a row, in all of which he was undefeated: the double-round tournament in Triberg (1. Alekhine – 7 out of 8; 2. Bogoljubow – 5), Budapest (1. Alekhine – 8½ out of 11; 2. Grünfeld – 8 ... 6. Euwe – 5½; 7. Bogoljubow – 5) and The Hague (1. Alekhine – 8 out of 9; 2. Tartakower – 7; 3. Rubinstein – 6½).

The following is not, perhaps, the most typical example of his play. Nevertheless it shows that Alekhine was blazing new trails in chess, not even giving in to the authority of the deified Capablanca.

Game 116

F.Yates-A.Alekhine

The Hague 1921



23 ... Qc3

Alekhine attaches an exclamation mark to this move (although I would have played 23 ... f4! immediately) and makes an interesting , somewhat malicious, comment:

‘Against this move White has nothing better than to offer an exchange of queens, because after 24 Re3 Black would gain the necessary time by 24 ... Qf6 to occupy the d-file, which would be decisive.

‘The ensuing endgame admits of a majority of pawns on the queenside for White, but this advantage is here somewhat illusory. On this subject I am anxious to state that one of the most notorious prejudices of modern theory lies in the fact that this majority is *in itself* considered an advantage, without any reference to whatever pawns or, more especially, pieces are concerned.

‘In the present game Black has very evident compensations: (1) the greater mobility of the black king, the adverse king being hampered by his own pawns; (2) the dominating position of the black rook on the only open file. With correct play, these points should ensure a win.’

Alekhine would appear to be conducting a correspondence dispute with Capablanca, who classically converted a queenside pawn majority in the 23rd game of his match with Marshall (*Game No.75*). And although he clearly overrates Black’s chances (the white pawns are also mobile!), these comments reflect his style: the advance of the e- and f-pawns creates tactical threats to the king. The most interesting thing here is the clash of conceptions: whereas Capa ‘simply’ queened a pawn, Alekhine ‘simply’ gave mate! But the successful strategy of both the one, and the other, depended mainly on the fact that their opponents did not understand their plans at all ...

24 Qc1

It is likely that 24 Re3 Qf6 25 c5 Rd8 26 Qc1 was nevertheless possible, but White, remembering Capablanca’s successful experience, heads for the endgame.

24 ... Qxc1

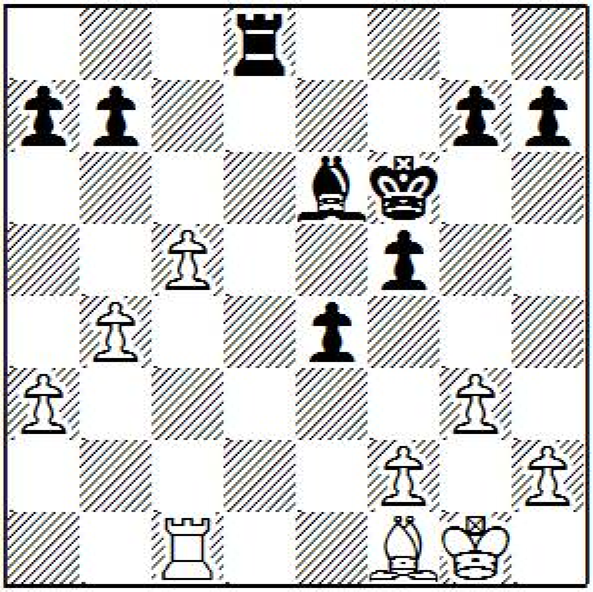
Black does not object, already anticipating the manoeuvre of his king to e5 and the development of an instructive attack with a small army. Fischer’s remark involuntarily comes to mind: ‘He disliked clear-cut positions. If an opponent wanted to clarify his situation with Alekhine, he had to pay the Russian’s price.’

25 Rxc1 Rd8 26 g3

‘Trying to exchange the bishops, which would increase White’s chances of a draw.’ (Kotov) 26 c5 Kf7 27 b5 Ke7 is good for Black.

26 ... Kf7 27 c5 Kf6

An important moment, which has escaped the attention of the commentators.



28 Bc4?!

The simple 28 c6! bxc6 29 Rxc6 Rd1 30 Kg2 Ke5 31 Bc4 Bxc4 32 Rxc4 would have ensured a draw: 32 ... Rd2 33 Kf1 etc. Of course, had Capa or Lasker being playing White, something like this would have happened ... But Yates wants to advance his a- and b-pawns – as Capablanca ‘bequeathed’!

28 ... Bc8! (this unexpected retreat was beyond the understanding of most of the masters of that time) **29 a4?!**

Evidently White should have moved his bishop from c4 and played c5-c6 as soon as possible. It soon transpires that the white pawns are ‘going nowhere’, whereas Black’s are weaving a mating net.

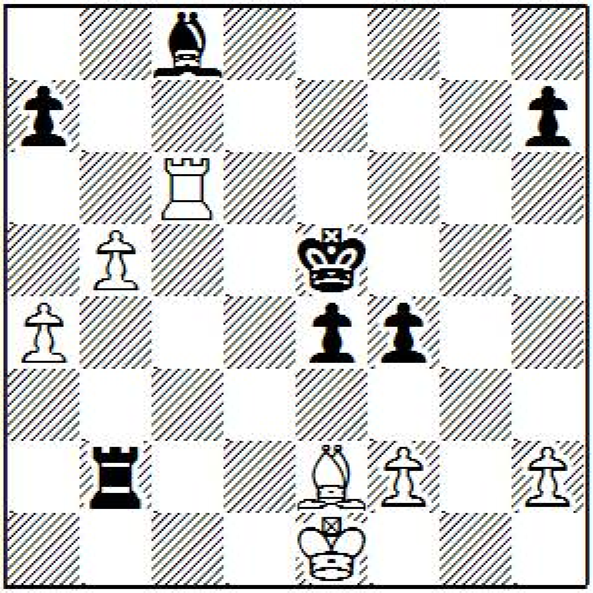
29 ... g5 30 b5 f4 31 Kf1 Rd2! 32 Ke1 Rb2 33 gxf4 (after 33 c6 bxc6 34 Be2 there is a choice between 34 ... Ke5 and 34 ... c5 35 Rxc5 Be6) **33 ... gxf4 34 Be2**

Or 34 Rd1 Bg4 35 Rd6+ Ke7 36 Rd4 Bf3 and 37 ... e3 (Alekhine). And here after 34 c6 bxc6 35 Be2, apart from 35 ... Ke5 there is 35 ... c5 36 Rxc5 Be6.

34 ... Ke5 35 c6 bxc6 36 Rxc6?!

‘Bad is 36 bxc6 f3 37 Bd1 e3 and wins.’ (Kotov) But after 38 Rc2! Rxc2 (38 ... Rb1? 39 fxe3) 39 Bxc2 there is no question of Black winning!

Therefore after 36 bxc6 he would have had to continue seeking how to exploit his positional advantage.



36 ... Be6 37 Bd1

The awkward position of the bishop also tells in the variation 37 Rc7 (37 Bc4 Bg4!) 37 ... Rb1+ 38 Kd2 Kd4 39 Kc2 Ra1! 40 Bd1 (40 Rxa7? Ra2+) 40 ... Rxa4. Unexpectedly White’s position has become lost: while rigorously carrying out the plan of a queenside offensive, he finds himself facing mate.

37 ... Rb1 38 Rc5+ Kd4 39 Rc2 e3 (or 39 ... Bb3!? 40 Rd2+ Kc4 winning) **40 fxe3+ fxe3 41 Rc6 Bg4 42 Rd6+ Kc5 43 h3 Bh5 0-1**

With the irresistible threat of ... e3-e2.

The autumn triumph in The Hague was especially noteworthy for Alekhine, since he finished 1½ points ahead of (and defeated in their individual game) the official challenger Rubinstein. (Back in the spring Rubinstein had challenged Capablanca to a match for the world crown, but alas, during the two and a half years granted him by the champion, he was not in fact able to raise the necessary funds.)

Without thinking for long, the Russian grandmaster also issued a challenge to Capablanca! A report even appeared in the press that a match between them would take place at the end of 1922 in America ... But this all turned out to be a bluff. Later Alekhine admitted: ‘I did not yet feel fully mature in the chess sense. In many fields, especially in technique, Capablanca was undoubtedly stronger than me at that time, and his main opponent still remained Lasker ... Therefore my challenge had only one aim – to strengthen my candidature for the future.’

Here it is worth recalling a distinctive, as always, opinion of Fischer: ‘Alekhine developed as a player much more slowly than most. In his twenties, he was an atrocious chessplayer, and didn’t mature until he was well into his thirties.’

This is, of course, going too far, but I would like to see how Fischer himself would have played after the events between 1914-1921 described above ...

The new challenger also performed quite well in the spring of 1922 in Pistyan: 1. Bogoljubow – 15 out of 18; 2-3. Alekhine and Spielmann – 14½; 4. Grünfeld – 11; 5. Réti – 10½ etc. Here Alekhine was awarded two special prizes: for the most brilliant game of the tournament (against Wolf) and for the best game played by a Slav master (against Tarrasch).

However, I will show you another brilliant game by Alekhine, of which he was very proud, since in it he carried out ‘the longest combination in his life’. Although it turned out to have a flaw, discovered by the all-seeing eye of the computer ...

Game 117

K.Treybal-A.Alekhine

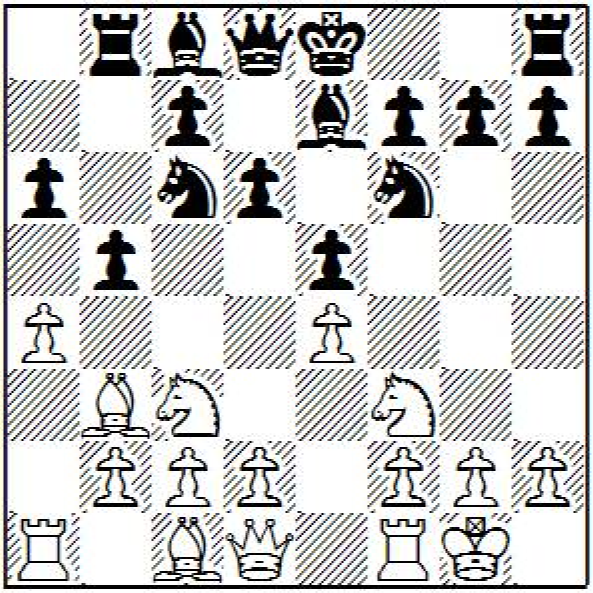
Pistyan 1922

Ruy Lopez C84

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 Nc3 (this modest plan was also employed by Alekhine) **5 ... Be7 6 0-0 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 a4** (8 Nd5 Alekhine-Barcza, Munich 1942) **8 ... Rb8**

‘This move is distinctly inferior to 8 ... b4, for it abandons the a-file to White without any compensation.’ (Alekhine)

For example: 9 Nd5 (9 Ne2 Be6!?) 9 ... Na5 10 Ba2 (10 Nxe7+ Qxe7 11 d4 Nxb3 is level, Thomas-Alekhine, Hastings 1922) 10 ... Nxd5 11 Bxd5 c6 12 Ba2 c5 13 c3 Rb8 14 Bd5 0-0 with equality (Alekhine-Bogoljubow, Pistyan 1922).

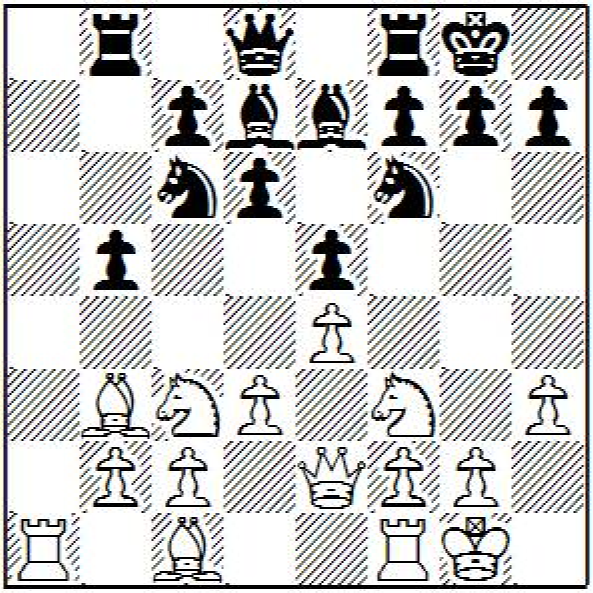


9 axb5 axb5 10 h3

Not an essential move. 10 Qe2?! Bg4! 11 Nxb5 0-0 12 Qc4 Bxf3 13 gxf3 Rxb5 14 Qxc6 Rb6 15 Qc3 Nh5! 16 d3 Bg5 is risky for White, but quite good, according to Réti, is 10 d3 Bg4 (10 ... 0-0 11 Nd5!) 11 Be3 0-0 12 Nd5! with a slight initiative.

10 ... 0-0 11 Qe2 Bd7 12 d3

If 12 Nxb5, then 12 ... Nxe4! 13 Qxe4 (after 13 Nxc7?! both 13 ... Nxd2 and 13 ... Nc5 are good) 13 ... Rxb5 and Black has no problems (Ashley-Giorgadze, Philadelphia 1991).



12 ... Qc8!

‘Insufficient would be 12 ... Nd4 13 Nxd4 exd4 14 Nd5 Nxd5 15 Bxd5 c6 16 Bb3 Be6 17 Bxe6 fxe6 18 Ra7 Ra8 19 Rxa8 Qxa8 20 Qg4 Qc8 21 Bh6 Rf7 22 Ra1 with advantage to White.’ (Alekhine) Although here 20 ... Qa2!? and 20 ... Rf6!? must be considered.

13 Kh2

Just in case, Treybal prevents the bishop sacrifice on h3. Of course, more energetic was 13 Be3! (13 Nd5!?), when Alekhine was planning 13 ... Nd8 and ... c7-c5.

13 ... Nd4! (now Black has an easy game) **14 Nxd4 exd4 15 Nd5 Nxd5 16 Bxd5 c6 17 Bb3 Be6! 18 f4** (18 Bxe6 Qxe6 19 f4 f5 equalises) **18 ... Bxb3 19 cxb3 Ra8!**

‘Not 19 ... Qe6? because of 20 f5 Qxb3 21 Ra3 Qb4 22 f6! Bxf6 23 Rxf6 gxf6 24 Bh6 Kh8 25 Qf3 f5 26 Qxf5 f6 27 Ra7 and wins.’ (Alekhine)

20 Rxa8 (20 Rb1?! Qe6!) **20 ... Qxa8 21 f5 f6!?**

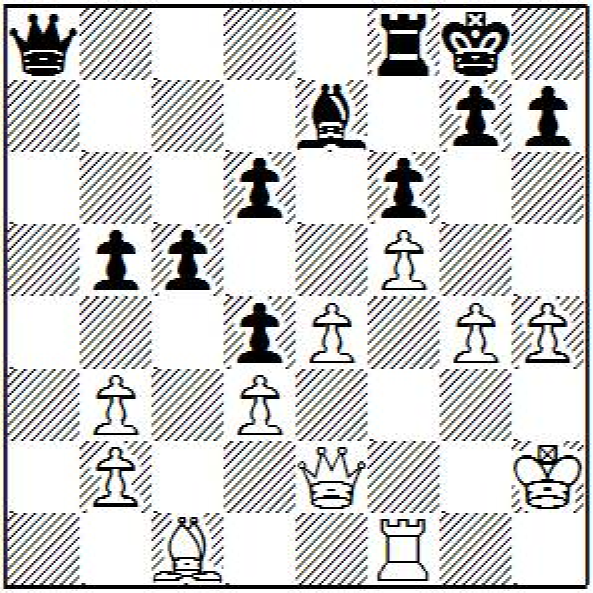
A secure barricade. Black was less attracted by 21 ... Bf6 22 Bf4 Rd8 23 Qe1! ‘followed by 24 Qa1 or 24 Qg3’, although after 23 ... c5 there is nothing terrible for him.

22 g4!?

‘Having embarked on a perilous journey, White has no option but to persevere, for, were he to adopt a purely defensive plan, Black would have a still more easy game than in the text, e.g. 22 b4 c5 23 Qc2 Qc6 followed by ... Ra8.’ (Alekhine) And yet 22 Bf4 was more natural, with equal chances.

22 ... c5 23 h4?

Overlooking a typical counter-blow in the centre. The cool 23 Bf4 was still correct, and if 23 ... Qa2 24 Qc2.

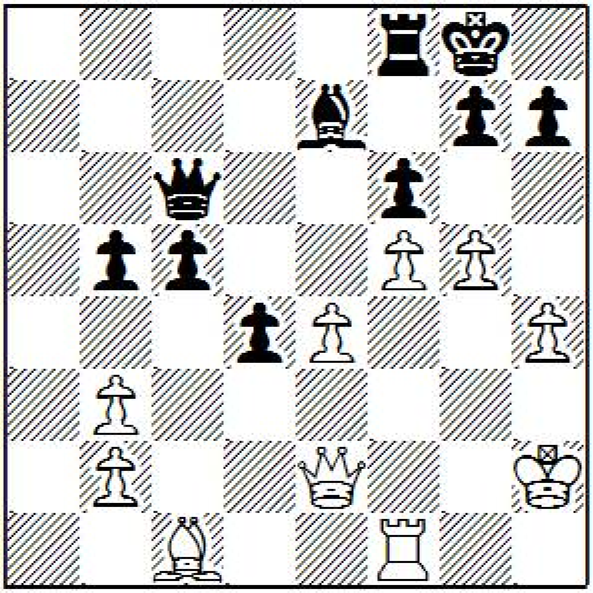


23 ... d5! (Alexander Alexandrovich did not miss such opportunities) **24 g5?!**

24 exd5 Bd6+ 25 Bf4 Re8 26 Qg2 Bxf4+ 27 Rxf4 Qb8 28 Qf3 Qe5 also favours Black.

If 24 e5 Alekhine was planning 24 ... Qb8 25 Bf4 fxe5 26 Bxe5 Bd6 ‘with advantage to Black’, but after 27 Bxd6 Qxd6+ 28 Kg2 this advantage still has to be demonstrated. 24 ... fxe5 25 Qxe5 Bxh4 was rejected by the future champion because of 26 g5 Re8 27 Qf4 Be1 (*27 ... Re1!? – G. K.*) 28 f6! with an attack, although, in my opinion, much stronger is 26 ... Qe8! 27 Qxd5+ (27 Qxe8 Rxe8 wins for Black) 27 ... Kh8 with the threat of ... Qh5: 28 Qxc5?! Bxg5! 29 Bxg5 Qh5+ etc.

24 ... dxe4 25 dxe4 Qc6



26 Kh3

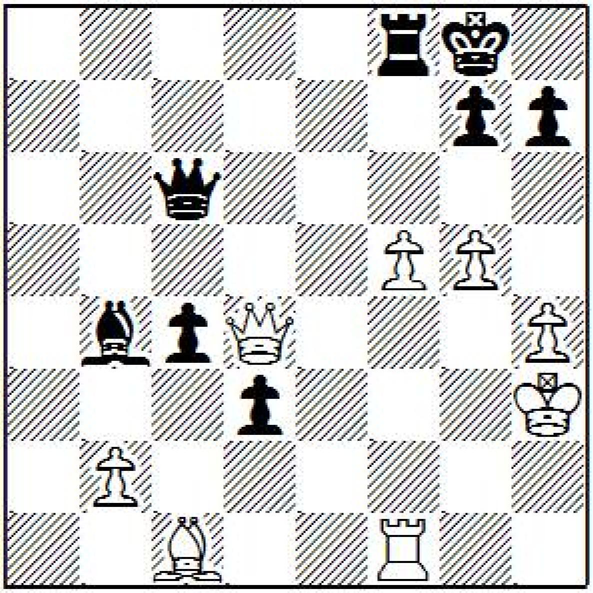
‘Preparing e4-e5. If 26 g6 h6 27 Qh5 Qxe4 28 Bxh6 gxh6 29 Qxh6 Qe2+ followed by 30 ... Qe3+ wins for Black.’ (Alekhine) 26 ... Bd6+ is also possible, and if 27 Kg2, then 27 ... hxg6 28 fxg6 f5! All the indications are that White can no longer save the game.

26 ... c4! 27 e5 d3 28 Qe1!

If 28 Qe3 Alekhine was intending 28 ... fxg5 29 hxg5 Rxf5! 30 Rxf5 Qe6 31 Qe4 g6 32 Kg4 (32 Qa8+ Kg7) 32 ... gxf5+ 33 Qxf5 Qxf5+ 34 Kxf5 Ba3!! winning.

28 ... fxe5 (28 ... fxg5 29 Bxg5!) **29 Qxe5 Bb4! 30 bxc4 bxc4 31 Qd4!**

Threatening to break up the black pawns by b2-b3. Treybal fights to the last!



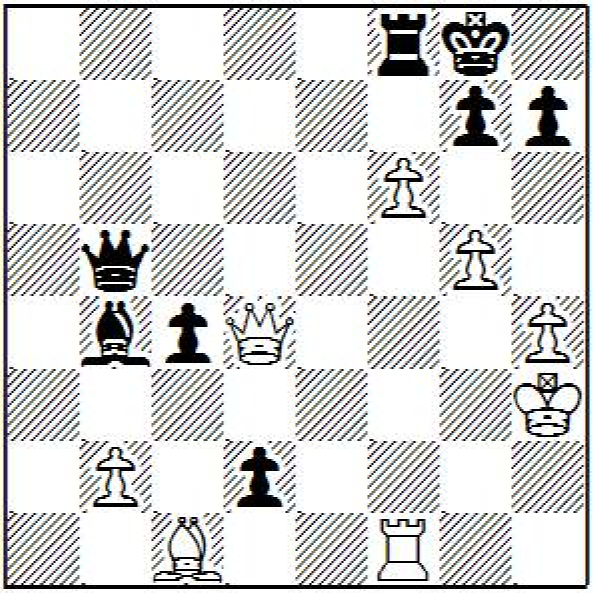
31 ... Qb5!

With the obvious threat of 32 ... Rxf5 and also a veiled one – 32 ... d2! 33 Bxd2 c3! (a double attack!), which White underestimated.

32 f6?!

The computer condemned this move, suggesting 32 Kg2. True, in this case Alekhine was intending to reply 32 ... Ba5! and then ... Rd8, which ‘would also win without difficulty’.

32 ... d2! (a spectacular breakthrough at a reinforced point!)



33 Qf4!

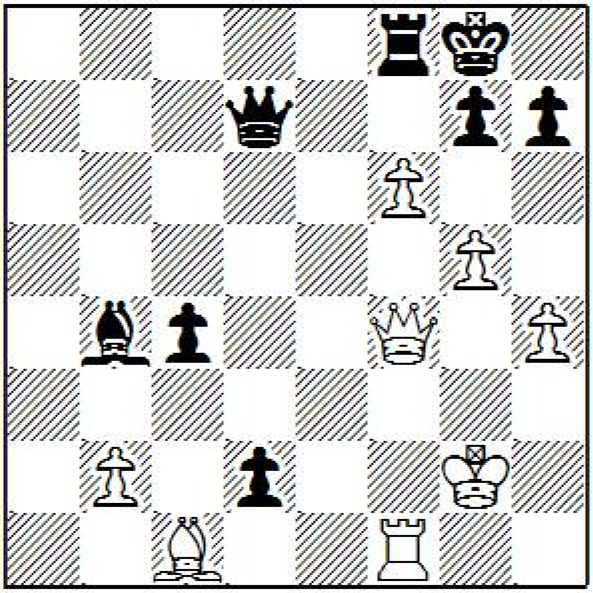
The best practical chance.

33 ... Qd7+!

White was ‘anticipating the continuation 33 ... dxc1Q 34 Rxc1 Rc8 (*no better is 34 ... Qd7+ 35 Kg2 or 34 ... gxf6 35 Qxc4+ Qxc4 36 Rxc4 – G. K.*) 35 Qg4! with drawing chances, since the h1-square is not of the same colour as Black’s bishop. By the ensuing combination (the longest which I have ever undertaken) Black avoids this doubtful variation and secures a winning pawn ending.’ (Alekhine)

Well, we’ll see, we’ll see ...

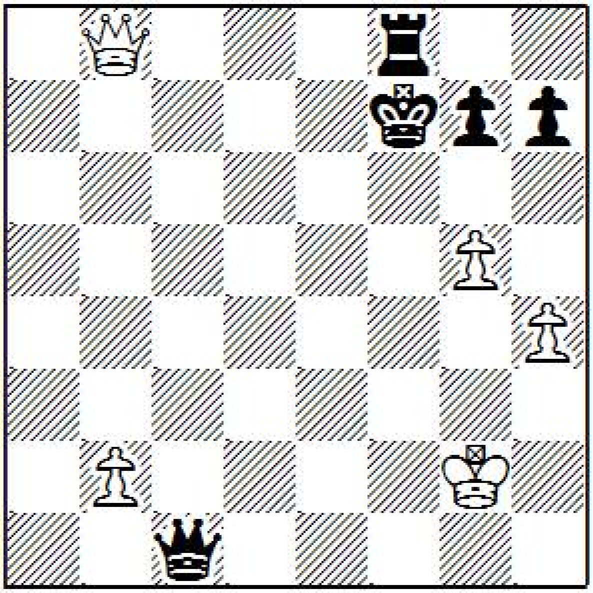
34 Kg2



34 ... d1Q?!

Alekhine, Kotov and others attach an exclamation mark to this move. But in my opinion, Black would have won much more quickly, and – most important – more certainly by 34 ... Qd5+! 35 Kh3 (35 Qf3 Qxf3+ 36 Kxf3 gxf6) 35 ... Qd3+ (35 ... gxf6 36 gxf6 Qe6+ is also good enough) 36 Kg2 gxf6 37 gxf6 Kf7 and ... Rg8+ (after the ‘spite’ checks 38 Qc7+ Ke6 39 Qc6+ Bd6).

35 Rxd1 Qxd1 36 Qxc4+ Rf7 37 Qxb4 Qxc1 38 Qb8+ Rf8 39 f7+! (the only way: after 39 Qb3+? Kh8 40 fxg7+ Kxg7 the checks come to an end) **39 ... Kxf7**



The culmination of the tactical duel. ‘As we shall see shortly, Black’s winning manoeuvre initiated by 33 ... Qd7+! comprises no less than 20 moves!’ (Alekhine)

40 Qb3+? Kg6! 0-1

White resigned due to 41 Qe6+ Kh5 42 Qe2+ Kxh4! etc.

Meanwhile, by 40 g6+!! Treybal could have regained the rook, since in the event of 40 ... hxg6 (40 ... Kg8? 41 gxh7+) White forces a draw by perpetual check: 41 Qb3+ Kf6 (or 41 ... Ke7 42 Qa3+ Ke8 43 Qa8+ Kf7 44 Qd5+) 42 Qf3+ Ke7 43 Qa3+ Ke8 44 Qa4+! Kd8 45 Qa8+ Ke7 46 Qa3+ Kf7 47 Qb3+ etc.

There remains only the one way, pointed out by Alekhine: 40 ... Kxg6! 41 Qxf8 Qxb2+ 42 Kf3(h3) Qc3+ 43 Kg2 Qd2+ 44 Kg3(h3) Qe3+ 45 Kg2 Qe4+ 46 Kg3 (46 Kh3 Qf5+) 46 ... Qe5+ 47 Kg2 Kh5! (a quiet move, connecting up the king) 48 Qf3+ (*? – G. K.*) 48 ... Kxh4 49 Qh3+ Kg5 50 Qxh7 Qe2+ 51 Kg3(g1) Qg4+, ‘and Black wins by forcing exchange of queens next move.’ (52 Kf2 Qf5+ or 52 Kh2 Qh4+.)

Alas, the computer refutes Alekhine’s longest combination by 48 Qb4! Now Black is unable to force the transition into a pawn endgame, and with the queens on such endings with an extra pawn are drawish. For example: 48 ... g6 49 Kf3 Qe6 50 Kg3 Qe3+ 51 Kg2 Qd3 52 Qe7 h6 53 Qb4 Qe2+ 54 Kg3 Qe3+ 55 Kg2 etc.

It follows that White missed a draw. It is evident that Fischer was right, when he stated that at the chessboard, Alekhine radiated a furious tension that often intimidated his opponents.

But Black, in turn, missed a win back on the 34th move, when he did not play 34 ... Qd5+! This game, on the one hand, demonstrates Alekhine's amazing calculating ability, but on the other hand it reminds one of an old truth, that any analysis longer than five moves will contain a 'hole' ... even if we have before us a masterpiece from the treasury of chess art.

Here is another example of the energetic positional-combinative play of the fourth world champion.

Game 118

A.Torres-A.Alekhine

Exhibition game, Seville 1922

Ruy Lopez C73

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 d6

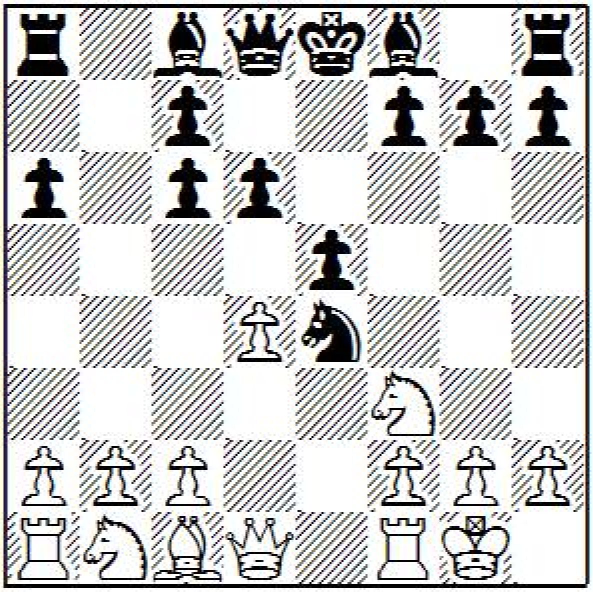
'This move, commended by Rubinstein, seems to me less sound than 5 ... Be7.' (Alekhine)

6 Bxc6+

One of the main replies, along with 6 c3 and 6 Re1. But if 6 d4, then 6 ... b5! 7 Bb3 Nxd4 8 Nxd4 exd4 9 c3!? (9 Bd5 Nxd5 10 exd5 Be7 equalises Treybal-Rubinstein, Carlsbad 1923) 9 ... dxc3 10 Nxc3 Be7 11 Qf3 (11 f4 Bb7) 11 ... 0-0! 12 e5?! Bg4 etc.

6 ... bxc6 7 d4! Nxe4!

A sharp reply! 'The exchange 7 ... exd4 8 Nxd4 leads to an unfavourable variation of the Steinitz Defence. Here Chigorin's move 7 ... Nd7 is also not especially favourable in view of 8 Na3 and Nc4.' (Keres)

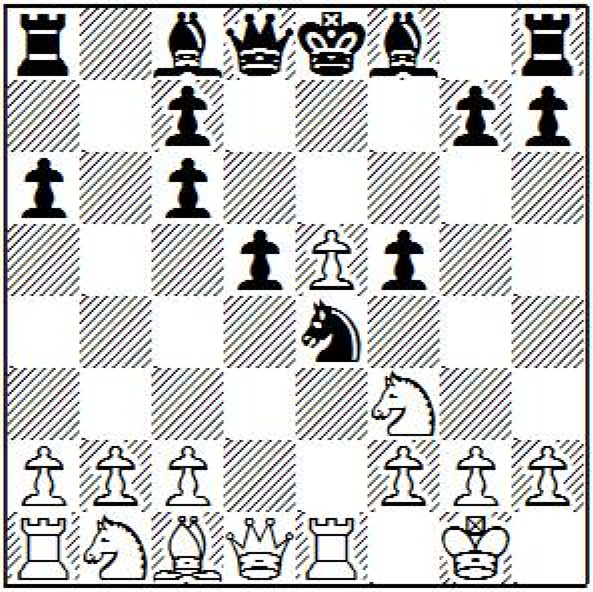


8 Re1

The alternative is 8 dxe5 d5 (8 ... Be7!? Gurgenidze-Spassky, 29th USSR Championship, Baku 1961) 9 Nbd2 or 8 Qe2 f5 9 dxe5 (after 9 Nbd2 Nxd2 10 Nxd2 Be7 11 dxe5 Euwe advises 11 ... 0-0! 12 Qc4+ Kh8 13 Qxc6 Rb8) 9 ... d5, and here not 10 Rd1 c5 (10 ... Bc5!? Euwe) 11 c4 c6 equalising (Rubinstein), and not 10 Be3 c5! 11 c3 Be7 (Kubanek-Alekhine, Prague 1943), but 10 c4! Bc5 (10 ... d4!?) 11 Be3 with a slight initiative.

9 ... f5 9 dxe5 d5

‘Now Black has undoubtedly the better game, with his two bishops and his strongly-posted knight in the centre.’ (Alekhine) A clearly premature verdict!



10 Nd4!

In the early 1940s 10 Nc3 Bc5 11 Be3 was fashionable (Boleslavsky-Smyslov, match-tournament, Leningrad/Moscow 1941), but stronger is 10 ... Bb4! 11 Nd4 Nxc3 12 bxc3 Bxc3 13 Ba3 Qh4!, and if 14 Nxc6? Be6! (analysis by Botvinnik). And in the late 1990s Adams introduced 10 c4!?

10 ... Bc5

Bad is 10 ... c5? 11 Ne2! c6 12 Nf4 g6 13 c4! d4 14 Qa4 (Keres-Reshevsky, AVRO Tournament, Holland 1938), whereas 10 ... Qh4 allows Fine’s variation 11 g3 Qh3 12 Nc3!, after which both 12 ... Nxf2?! (12 ... Bc5 13 Nce2!) 13 Kxf2 Qxh2+ 14 Kf3 and 12 ... c5 13 Nde2! d4 14 Nd5 Nxf2?! 15 Kxf2 Qxh2+ 16 Kf3! Bb7 17 c4 are incorrect.

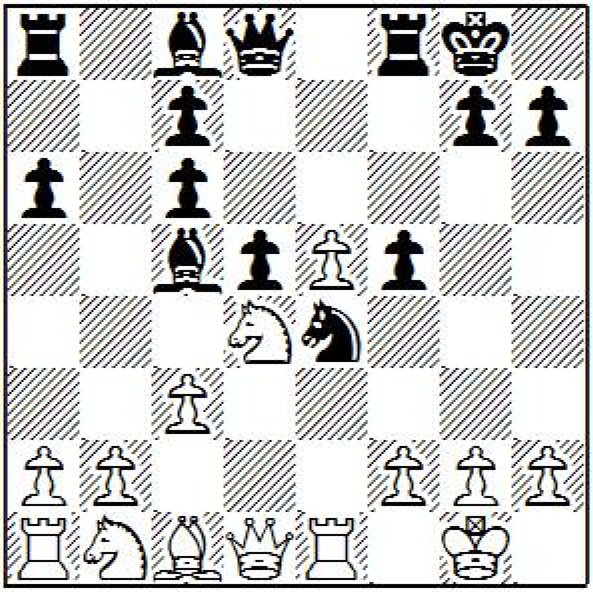
11 c3

If 11 Be3, then 11 ... f4! 12 Nxc6 (but not 12 Bxf4?! 0-0 13 Be3 Nxf2! 14 Bxf2 Rxf2 15 Kxf2 Qh4+ etc.) 12 ... fxe3 13 Nxd8 exf2+ 14 Kf1 fxe1Q+ 15 Kxe1 Bf2+ 16 Kf1 Rf8 17 Qxd5 Bc5+ 18 Ke1 Bf2+ with perpetual check (Euwe). But 11 f3 Qh4 12 c3 is interesting, excluding the possibility of 11 ... 0-0.

11 ... 0-0

Soviet masters later developed the very sharp continuation 11 ... Qh4!? 12 f3 Nf2 13 g3! Qh5 14 Kxf2! (dangerous is 14 Qe2 Nh3+ 15 Kg2 f4! 16 e6 0-0 17 g4 Qh4, when 18 Nf5? fails to 18 ... Rxf5 19 gxf5 Nf2 winning)

14 ... Qxh2+ 15 Ke3, and although for the piece Black has two pawns and some attack, in the game Bonch-Osmolovsky-Estrin (Moscow 1945) White was able to convert his material advantage.



12 f4?

At last the enormous difference in the class of the two players tells. Also weak is 12 f3 Ng5 13 Be3? f4 14 Bf2 Bb6! 15 Nd2 c5 (Romanovsky).

But the old game Flamberg-Salve (Lodz 1906) went 12 f3 Ng5 13 Kh1! Bxd4 (according to Romanovsky, 13 ... f4!? 14 Nxc6 Qd7 15 Nd4 Qf7 is correct), and here Chigorin recommended 14 Bxg5! Qxg5 15 cxd4 (15 Qxd4!?) 15 ... f4 16 Nc3 Rf5 17 Na4 Qh6 18 Re2! Rh5 19 Qg1 with an obvious advantage to White – the c5-square! It was the same after 15 ... Rb8 16 b3 Qh4 17 Nc3 (Smyslov-Levenfish, Moscow 1938).

12 ... Qe8 (now Black’s position is indeed significantly better!) **13 Be3 Bb6 14 Nd2 Bb7**

‘In perfect safety Black prepares the advance of his centre pawns, thus enabling his bishops to exercise pressure on the hostile king.’ (Alekhine)

15 N2f3 Rd8 16 Qc2 c5 17 Nb3?!

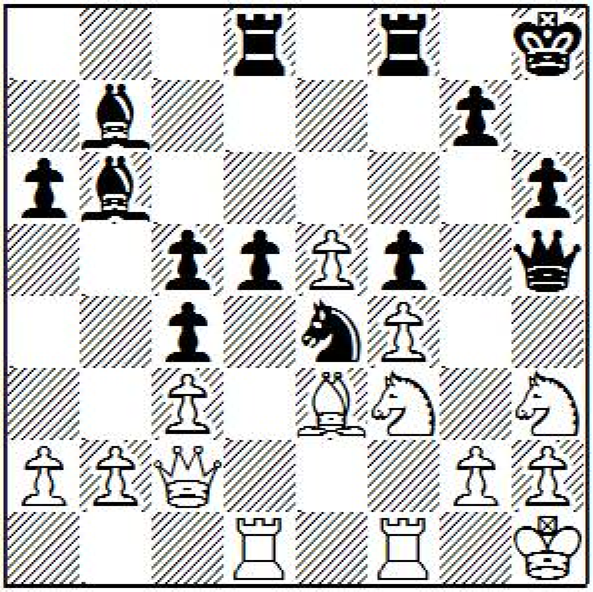
‘17 Ne2 at once was preferable, upon which Black would probably have continued 17 ... h6, followed by 18 ... Kh8 and 19 ... Rg8, preparing to open the g-file by ... g7-g5.’ (Alekhine)

17 ... c4! (further intensifying the pressure in the centre) **18 Nbd4** (18 Bxb6? cxb3) **18 ... c5 19 Ne2 Qc6 20 Rad1 h6 21 Rf1 Kh8!**

An important link of the future combination: the king moves not so much to make ... Rg8 possible, but so that after ... d5-d4 White cannot take the c4-pawn with check.

22 Kh1 Qg6 (with the intention of ... Qh5 and ... g7-g5) **23 Neg1 Qh5 24 Nh3**

By defending against the flank attack, Torres goes from the frying pan into the fire.



24 ... d4! (the decisive breakthrough, based on a queen sacrifice) **25 cxd4 cxd4 26 Bxd4 Bxd4 27 Rxd4 Rxd4 28 Nxd4 Qxh3! 29 gxh3 Nf2++ 30 Kg1 Nxh3 mate!**

In the summer of 1922, in the London ‘victory tournament’, the first direct duel after the War between Alekhine and Capablanca took place. The Russian played well (+8 =7), but the Cuban played even better (+11 =4). The results of this tournament are given on p.296, but the moral outcome for Alekhine was the start of his gradual advance to the role of main contender to the throne: he left behind Rubinstein, and Bogoljubow, and Réti (true, the picture was somewhat obscured by the absence of the still mighty Lasker). At the same time the participants signed the so-called

‘London agreement’ – the regulations for world championship matches proposed by Capablanca (cf. p.299).

The double-round tournament at Hastings in September 1922 reinforced this tendency: 1. Alekhine – 7½ out of 10; 2. Rubinstein – 7; 3-4. Bogoljubow and Thomas – 4½ etc. Alexander again, as in London (and The Hague!) defeated Rubinstein once, and Bogoljubow twice.

The last of these wins is one of the most grandiose Alekhine canvases. It once again shows that his amazing combinations did not arise out of thin air, but were the fruit of very deep strategic preparation.

Game 119

E.Bogoljubow-A.Alekhine

Hastings 1922

Dutch Defence A90

1 d4 f5

‘A risky defence which up to the present I have adopted only very infrequently in serious games. But in the present game I had positively to play for a win in order to make sure of first prize, whereas a draw was sufficient for my opponent to secure third prize, and hence I found myself forced to run some risks.’ (Alekhine)

2 c4

According to Alekhine it is better to begin with 2 g3, so that Black should not be able to exchange his f8-bishop. But is this really to his advantage?

2 ... Nf6 3 g3 e6 4 Bg2 Bb4+ 5 Bd2

If 5 Nd2 correct is 5 ... 0-0!, but not 5 ... Ne4? 6 a3 Nxd2 7 Bxd2 Bxd2+ 8 Qxd2 0-0 9 Nh3! d5 10 cxd5 exd5 11 Nf4 c6 12 0-0 Qe7 13 b4! with a clear advantage (Alekhine-Tartakower, San Remo 1930).

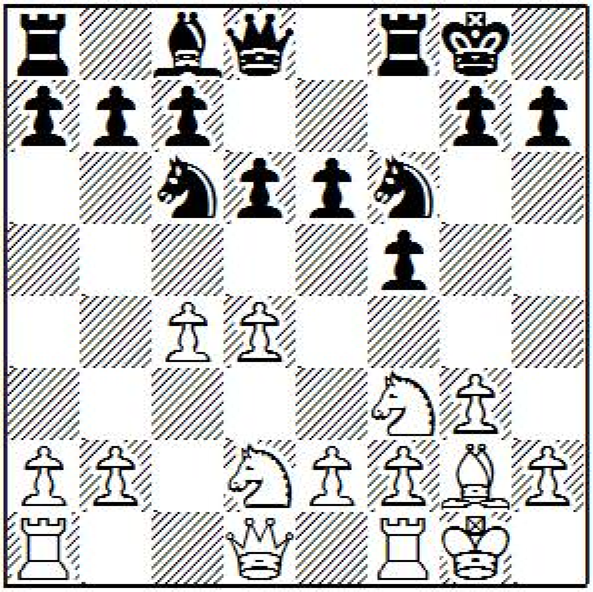
5 ... Bxd2+

In his match with Euwe (1935) and later, the fourth world champion played 5 ... Be7.

6 Nxd2

Of course, more accurate is 6 Qxd2! 0-0 7 Nc3 with some initiative, which in the event of 7 ... d6 8 Nf3 Nc6 9 Rd1!? (or 9 0-0 e5 10 d5 Ne7 11 e4) 9 ... Ne7 (9 ... Qe7 10 d5!) 10 0-0 Ng6 11 Qc2 c6 (11 ... f4!?) 12 e4! Qa5 13 exf5 exf5 14 d5 cxd5 15 Nxd5 can become serious (Euwe-Alekhine, Amsterdam 10th matchgame 1926/27).

6 ... Nc6 7 Ngf3 0-0 8 0-0 (Tartakower suggested 8 Qc2!? with the idea of e2-e4) **8 ... d6**



9 Qb3 Kh8?!

For some reason most commentators don’t mention the immediate 9 ... e5!, when Black need not fear either 10 c5+ Kh8 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 Rfd1 Qe7 13 Rac1 Bd7, or 10 Qc3 a5! 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 Rad1 Qe7 with equal chances in both cases (Spielmann).

10 Qc3?!

‘It is already difficult to suggest a satisfactory line of play for White.’ (Alekhine) Why? After 10 d5! Black would have faced a thankless defence: 10 ... Na5 11 Qc3 c5 12 Ng5 or 10 ... exd5 11 cxd5 Ne7 (11 ... Ne5 12 Nd4!) 12 Nd4 etc.

10 ... e5! 11 e3

No better is 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 Rad1 (12 Nxe5? Nxe5 13 Qxe5 Qxd2 drops a piece) 12 ... Qe7 13 Rfe1 e4 etc. (Pirc-Spielmann, Rogaëka Slatina match 1931).

11 ... a5! (hindering b2-b4) **12 b3** (but not 12 a3?! a4!) **12 ... Qe8! 13 a3 Qh5!**

‘The start of a deep strategic plan. First of all Black creates threats on the kingside and provokes a weakening of the opponent’s pawns.’ (Kotov)

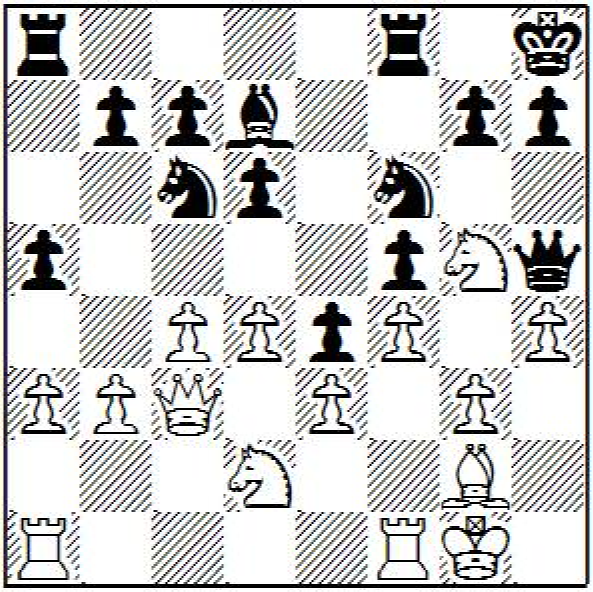
14 h4

‘A good defensive move, which secures new squares for his king’s knight and revives the threat of 15 dxe5. White cannot answer 14 dxe5 dxe5 15 Nxe5? Nxe5 16 Qxe5 on account of 16 ... Ng4, winning outright, nor can he play 14 b4? e4 15 Ne1 axb4.’ (Alekhine)

14 ... Ng4 15 Ng5?! (according to Alekhine, 15 b4 was preferable) **15 ... Bd7 16 f3**

16 Bxc6?! Bxc6 17 f3 was bad because of 17 ... exd4! 18 fxg4 dxc3 19 gxh5 cxd2 with the better endgame for Black.

16 ... Nf6 (with the threat of 17 ... f4!) **17 f4 e4**



18 Rfd1?!

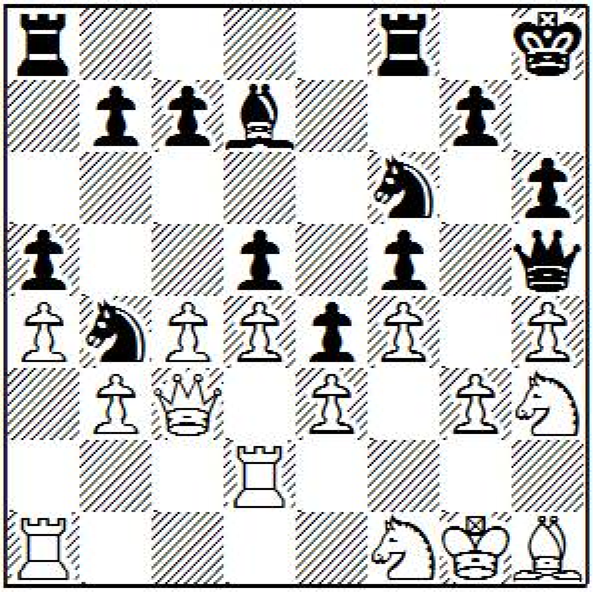
‘In order to protect the g3-pawn (which was threatened by 18 ... Qg4 and 19 ... Nh5) by Nf1. However, the preliminary advance 18 d5!, preventing Black from forming a centre, would have yielded White more chances of a successful defence.’ (Alekhine)

18 ... h6 19 Nh3 d5!

‘By this move Black completely wrecks his opponent’s hopes in the centre.’ (Alekhine) ‘The white pawns on the kingside have been weakened, and Black begins carrying out the second part of his plan: by initiating active play on the queenside, in the end he breaks through from the rear to the white king's position.' (Kotov)

20 Nf1 Ne7 (preparing 21 ... a4! 22 b4 dxc4 and ... Ned5) **21 a4 Nc6!** (and now ... Nb4-d3 is on the agenda) **22 Rd2 Nb4 23 Bh1**

Such moves are not made willingly ...



23 ... Qe8!

'This very strong move yields Black a new advantage in every case: either control of the square d5 after 24 cxd5, or the opening of a file on the queenside after 24 c5 b5!, or lastly, as in the actual game, the win of a pawn.' (Alekhine)

24 Rg2 (with the illusory hope of playing g3-g4) **24 ... dxc4 25 bxc4 Bxa4 26 Nf2 Bd7 27 Nd2 b5!**

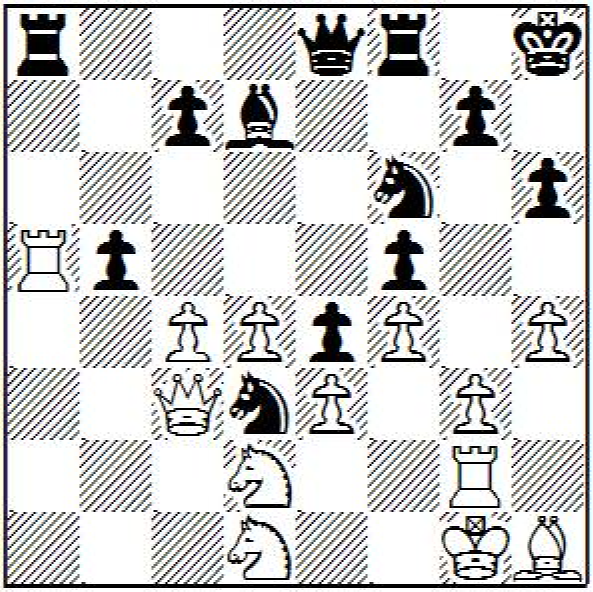
'This important strategic thrust in the battle for the d5-square leads to a highly interesting combination. The b-pawn is about to accomplish great deeds!' (Kotov)

28 Nd1 Nd3!

White's position looks terrible, but after the artless 28 ... bxc4?! 29 Nxc4 Nfd5 30 Qa3 his wretched knight would have gained access to the e5-square and the coordination of his scattered forces would have been unexpectedly restored.

29 Rxa5

The attempt to regain the pawn leads to disaster. But 29 cxb5 Bxb5 30 Rxa5 was no better in view of 30 ... Nd5 31 Qa3 Rxa5 32 Qxa5 Qc6 with a winning attack (Alekhine) or 31 Rxa8 Qxa8 32 Qb3 Ba4 etc.

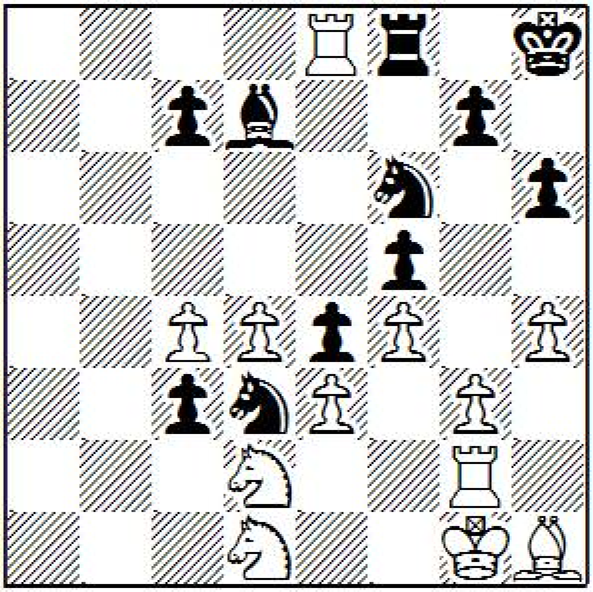


29 ... b4! 30 Rxa8 (after 30 Qa1 Rxa5 31 Qxa5 Qa8! 32 Qxa8 Rxa8 the invasion of the rook is decisive) **30 ... bxc3!!**

A brilliant interposition! ‘This continuation is much stronger than 30 ... Qxa8 31 Qb3 Ba4 32 Qb1, after which White could still defend himself.’ (Alekhine) However, after the simple 31 ... Qa1! 32 Qb1 Ra8 he would quickly have lost ... Black wants to create something immortal willy-nilly.

31 Rxe8

There is no choice.



31 ... c2!!

‘The point! White cannot prevent this pawn from queening.’ (Alekhine) Truly, as Alexander Alexandrovich used to say, ‘combination is the soul of chess’.

32 Rxf8+ Kh7

White’s queen’s rook can be proud: it has devoured Black’s queen and both his rooks. But on its own the modest b7-pawn cancels out these achievements! The complete triumph of mind over matter!

33 Nf2 (there is nothing else) **33 ... c1Q+ 34 Nf1 Ne1!**

With the unexpected threat of ... Nf3 mate.

35 Rh2 Qxc4

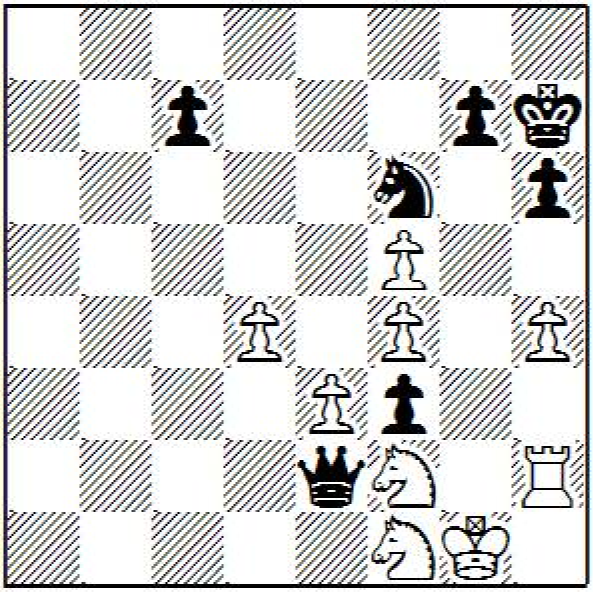
‘A new threat of mate in a few moves, commencing with 36 ... Bb5, which compels White to sacrifice the exchange.’ (Alekhine)

36 Rb8 Bb5 37 Rxb5 Qxb5 38 g4

With the faint hope of including the sickly h1-bishop in the game. But another surprise is in store for White.

38 ... Nf3+! 39 Bxf3 exf3 40 gxf5 (forced: 40 g5 Ng4 41 Nxg4 fxg4 wins) **40 ... Qe2!!**

Creating a problem-like position. White is in zugzwang: any reply by him leads to immediate defeat.



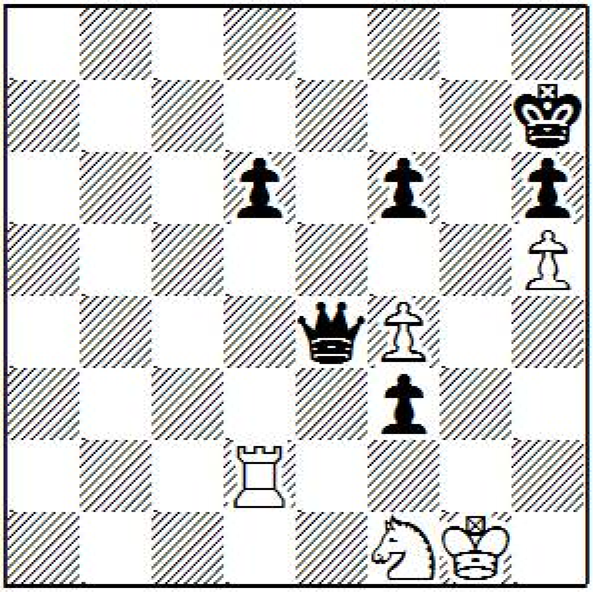
41 d5

After 41 Nh3 (41 Rh3 Ng4!) 41 ... Ng4! 42 Rxe2 fxe2! a third black queen would have appeared on the board.

41 ... Kg8! (but not 41 ... h5? 42 Nh3! intending 43 Ng5+) **42 h5 Kh7** (a demonstration of strength) **43 e4**

The only move, but even it leads to a lost ending.

43 ... Nxe4 44 Nxe4 Qxe4 45 d6 cxd6 46 f6 gxf6 47 Rd2



47 ... Qe2!

‘A pretty finish, worthy of this fine game.’ (Alekhine)

48 Rxe2 fxe2 49 Kf2 exf1Q+ 50 Kxf1 Kg7 51 Kf2 Kf7 52 Ke3 Ke6 53 Ke4 d5+ 0-1

There’s no denying that this is an excellent present for your 30th birthday!

After this dressing-down Bogoljubow was depressed for a time, but on the other hand the ‘great Akiba’ roused himself, as was shown two months later in Vienna 1922: 1. Rubinstein – 11½ out of 14; 2. Tartakower – 10; 3. H. Wolf – 9½; 4-6. Alekhine, Maróczy and Tarrasch – 9; 7. Grünfeld – 8; 8. Réti – 7½; 9. Bogoljubow – 6½ etc.

It would appear that the Russian champion became rather tired towards the end of the year. Take a look at his portrait, painted by the Vienna press: ‘Alekhine is the embodiment of nervousness. The facial expression of this tall, elegant young man is constantly changing; the impulsive movements of his hands, with which he first passes impetuously through his light-gingery hair, then quickly picks up pieces that have been removed from the board – all this reflects the intense, passionate working of his mind ... After his every move he quickly stands up, with rapid, impetuous steps his elegant figure moves from board to board, and with a keen glance he takes in the positions in the games. If his opponent succeeds in putting him in a difficult position with an unexpected manoeuvre, he becomes irritable and impatient; the slightest noise gets on his nerves; his bright eyes are fixed searchingly on his opponent, as though with the aim of penetrating into his thoughts – and when he finds a good reply, a triumphant smile lights up his face. The board at which Alekhine is playing is always surrounded by a dense crowd of spectators.'

From Vienna, Alekhine departed to Paris, where he settled among the numerous Russian émigrés ...

From Carlsbad to Baden-Baden

The most important tournaments of 1923 were in May in Carlsbad, where 'everyone' played, apart from Capa and Lasker, and in July in Mährisch-Ostrau, where 'everyone' played, apart from Capa and Alekhine. One general feature of these tournaments was the failure of Rubinstein, who began to drop out of the circle of contenders for the crown. In Mährisch-Ostrau the winner was Lasker, and in Carlsbad there were three: 1-3. Alekhine, Bogoljubow and Maróczy – 11½ out of 17; 4-5. Grünfeld and Réti – 10½; 6-7. Nimzowitsch and Treybal – 10 etc.

However, the moral winner of Carlsbad can safely be regarded as Alekhine: he defeated his three nearest rivals: Bogoljubow, Maróczy and Grünfeld, and he was denied clear first place only by unexpected losses to Treybal and Yates. In addition he won two brilliancy prizes!

Game 120

E.Grünfeld-A.Alekhine

Carlsbad 1923

Queen's Gambit D64

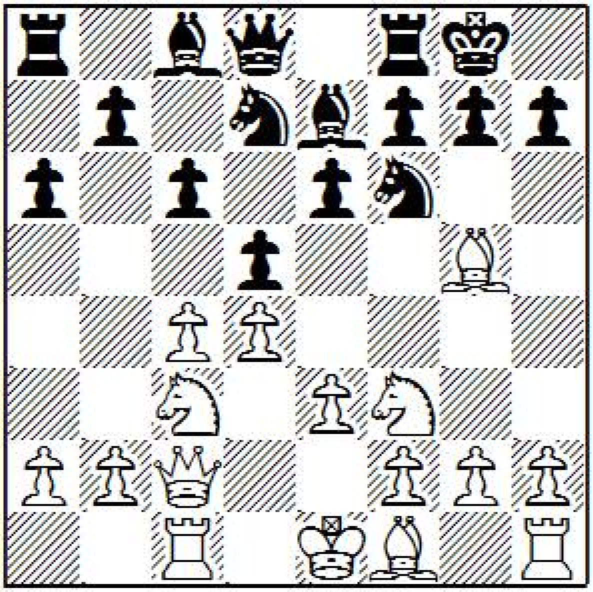
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Bg5 Be7 5 Nf3 Nbd7 6 e3 0-0 7 Rc1 c6 (a *tabiya* of the Orthodox Defence; for 7 ... a6, cf. *Games No.105 and 128*) **8 Qc2 a6**

Here Alekhine makes a valuable and instructive comment:

'In my opinion better than 8 ... h6, upon which White could have replied advantageously 9 Bf4! Re8 (if 9 ... Ne4, then 10 Bd3! f5 11 h4 followed at need by g2-g3 and Ne5 with advantage to White) 10 Bd3 dxc4 11 Bxc4 b5 12 Bd3 a6 13 a4! The game Alekhine-Teichmann (Carlsbad 1923) unfolded itself in the following way: 13 ... Bb7 14 0-0 Rc8 15 Qb3 Qb6 16 Ne5 Red8 17 Ng6! Bf8 18 Nxf8 Nxf8 19 Ne4 Nxe4 20 Bxe4 Nd7 21 Bd6! Nf6 22 Bc5 Qc7 23 Bf3 a5, and White by playing for example 24 Rfe1 or 24 Rc2, instead of accepting the pawn sacrificed, which only led to a draw, would have retained a winning position.

‘Every international tournament brings a fresh and sufficient line of play for Black. In the Mährisch-Ostrau tournament of 1923 Wolf played against the great theorist Grünfeld the simple continuation: 8 ... Ne4 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 Bd3 (10 Nxe4 obviously leads to nothing, for if White captures the pawn on e4 he loses his b-pawn) 10 ... Nxc3, with a very defendable game which resulted in a draw.’ Then Black plays ... dxc4, ... b7-b6, ... Bb7 etc.

It was because of the typical relieving manoeuvre 8 ... Ne4! that White gradually came to reject 7 Rc1 c6 8 Qc2 in favour of the immediate 7 Qc2.



9 a3

The struggle for a tempo. 9 a4 was also played (*Game No.121*), but the Capablanca-Alekhine match (1927) showed that 9 cxd5!? is more promising (*Game No.105*).

9 ... h6 10 Bh4

Also after 10 Bf4 good is 10 ... Re8 11 Bd3 dxc4 12 Bxc4 b5 followed by ... Bb7 and ... c6-c5 (Alekhine-Capablanca, Buenos Aires 4th and 26th matchgames 1927).

10 ... Re8!

‘An important improvement on the line of play adopted by Maróczy against Grünfeld in the Vienna tournament of 1922. This game continued 10 ... dxc4 11 Bxc4 b5 12 Ba2 Bb7 13 Bb1 Re8 14 Ne5! Nf8 15 0-0, and White has far the better game.’ (Alekhine)

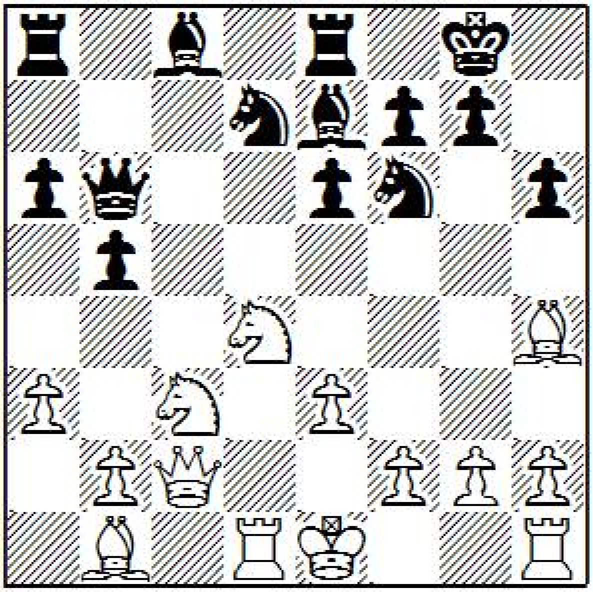
11 Bd3

Little is changed by 11 h3 dxc4 12 Bxc4 b5 13 Ba2 c5. If 11 Rd1, then 11 ... b5 is good (*Game No.126*). But White can consider transposing into the Carlsbad structure by 11 cxd5!? exd5 (11 ... Nxd5 12 Bg3!) 12 Bd3.

11 ... dxc4 12 Bxc4 b5 13 Ba2 c5 14 Rd1?!

Also unfavourable is 14 dxc5 Nxc5 15 Bb1 (15 0-0 Qd3!) 15 ... Bb7! 16 Bxf6?! Bxf6 17 Qh7+ Kf8 18 Nxb5 axb5 19 Rxc5 Bxb2 (Alekhine). However, 14 0-0 cxd4 (14 ... Qb6!?) 15 exd4 is more natural, as played in Carlsbad 1923 by Réti and Grünfeld against Teichmann.

14 ... cxd4 15 Nxd4 (this would appear to involve a tactical oversight) **15 ... Qb6 16 Bb1**



16 ... Bb7! 17 0-0

‘White had apparently been intending 17 Ndxb5?! axb5? 18 Rxd7 winning, but here he noticed the refutation – 17 ... Qc6!! 18 Nd4 (forced) 18 ... Qxg2 with a strong counterattack.’ (Alekhine)

17 ... Rac8

Black has comfortably completed his development and is now threatening 18 ... Be4 or 18 ... Ne4.

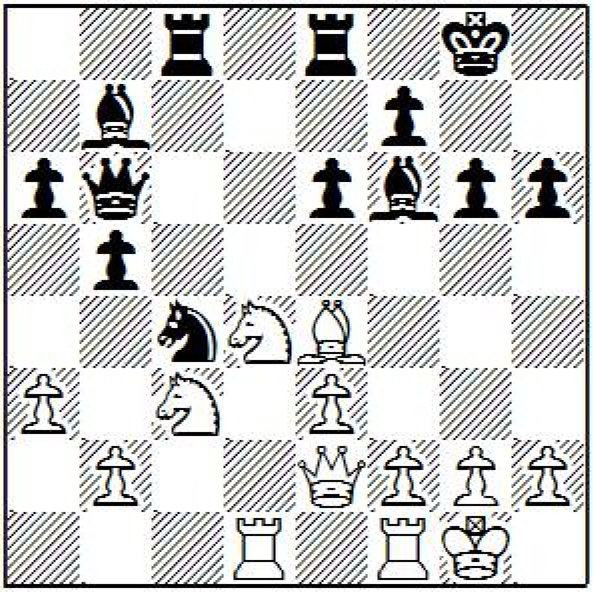
18 Qd2 (inferior is 18 Qe2?! Bxa3 19 Ncxb5 Bb4!) **18 ... Ne5!**

‘This knight will occupy the square c4, thereby fixing the weakness of the queenside, induced by 9 a3.’ (Alekhine)

19 Bxf6

With the intention of exchanging the dangerous b7-bishop. However, according to Alekhine, all White’s trickery is no longer sufficient to equalise.

19 ... Bxf6 20 Qc2 g6 (not so much a defence against Qh7+ as a preparation for ... Bg7) **21 Qe2 Nc4 22 Be4!**



22 ... Bg7!

Avoiding a subtle trap: after 22 ... Nxa3?! Grünfeld had prepared 23 Qf3! Bxe4 24 Nxe4 Bxd4 25 exd4 and 26 Nf6+, winning the exchange.

23 Bxb7 Qxb7 (threatening 24 ... Nxa3) **24 Rc1 e5!**

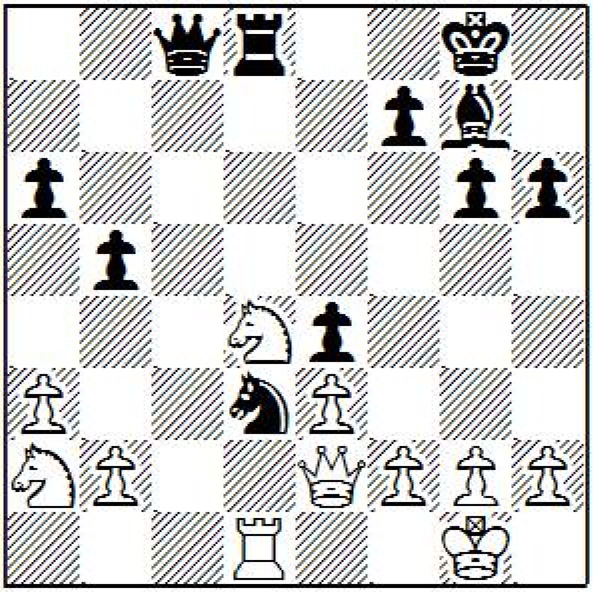
‘This advance of the e-pawn will give Black’s knight a new outpost on d3, still more irksome for the opponent than its present position.’

(Alekhine)

25 Nb3 e4 (again threatening ... Nxa3) **26 Nd4 Red8!** (gradually supporting the knight’s position at d3) **27 Rfd1 Ne5 28 Na2?!**

‘After this move, which removes the knight from the field of action, White is definitely lost. Comparatively better was 28 f3, upon which Black would have continued 28 ... exf3 29 gxf3 Nc4 with attacking chances on both flanks.’ (Alekhine)

28 ... Nd3 29 Rxc8 Qxc8



30 f3?

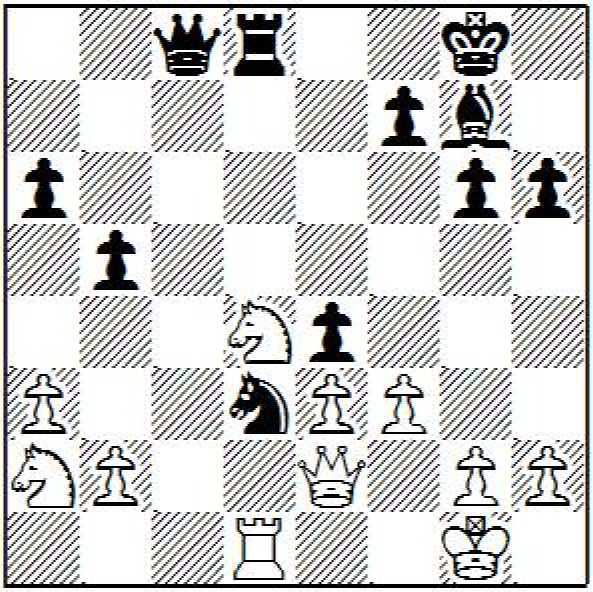
Completely outplayed by his mighty opponent, in desperation Grünfeld tries to undermine the d3-outpost as soon as possible: this knight is just too strong, paralysing White’s entire game and creating the preconditions for dangerous combinations.

However, the best chance was 30 Nc3 f5 31 f3. According to Alekhine, ‘Black would have gained the victory by the same sacrifice which occurred in the actual game: 31 ... Rxd4! 32 exd4 Bxd4+ 33 Kf1 Nf4 34 Qd2 Qc4+ 35 Ne2 e3! 36 Qe1 (*? – G. K.*) 36 ... Bxb2 37 Rd8+ Kf7 38 Qd1 Bxa3! 39 Qd7+ Be7 40 Qe8+ Kf6 41 Qh8+ Kg5 42 h4+ Kh5 43 g4+ fxg4 44 Qe5+ g5!! winning.’

But Kotov objects: ‘This pretty variation is nevertheless incorrect. The interposition of 36 b3!, which was not anticipated by Alekhine, leads to a win not for Black, but White (*for example: 36 ... exd2 37 bxc4 Nxe2 38 Kxe2 bxc4 39 Rxd2 – G. K.*). Thus 30 Nc3 was the correct continuation, giving a roughly equal game.'

Let us also correct Kotov. How, with such a powerful knight at d3, can White have an equal game?! The composed 31 ... Bxd4! (instead of 31 ... Rxd4?) 32 exd4 Qc4! 33 d5 Qc5+ 34 Kf1 Nf4 would have retained an enormous advantage. If 35 Qe1 Nxd5 36 Nxd5 Rxd5 White is simply a pawn down, whereas after 35 Qd2 (or 35 Qf2 e3 36 Qg3 Qc4+) 35 ... e3 his position quickly collapses: 36 Qe1 Qc4+ 37 Kg1 e2! 38 Rd2 Qc5+ 39 Kh1 Re8 40 d6 (40 h3 Qe3 41 d6 Qxd2) 40 ... Qf2!!, or 36 Qd4 e2+!! 37 Nxe2 Rxd5 38 Qxc5 Rxd1+ 39 Kf2 Nd3+, and the knight is again on the magic square!

But in the game Alekhine's 'main' combination worked – vivid, like a flash of lightning.



30 ... Rxd4! 31 fxe4

Here the rook is immune: if 31 exd4 Black wins by 31 ... Bxd4+ 32 Kf1 Nf4! 33 Qxe4 (or 33 Qd2 Qc4+ 34 Ke1 e3!) 33 ... Qc4+ 34 Ke1 Nxg2+ 35 Kd2 Be3+.

31 ... Nf4!!

The crowning stroke! Is it worth considering 31 ... Rxe4 32 Rxd3 (32 Qxd3 Qe6) 32 ... Rc4 or 31 ... Rd8 32 Rxd3 Rxd3 33 Qxd3 Bxb2, if White's sufferings can be curtailed instantly?!

32 exf4 Qc4!!

Diversion – one of the spectacular tactical devices in which all the games of the fourth champion abound.

33 Qxc4 (otherwise the knight at a2 is lost) **33 ... Rxd1+ 34 Qf1 Bd4+ 0-1**

A move before mate White resigned. A deserved brilliancy prize, wouldn't you agree?

Curiously enough, the very next day Alekhine upheld the same opening variation with White, and against the great Rubinstein ... And he earned himself another brilliancy prize!

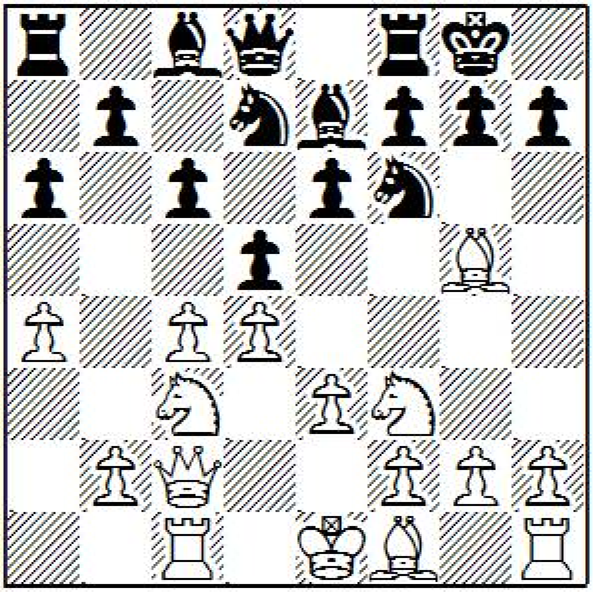
Game 121

A.Alekhine-A.Rubinstein

Carlsbad 1923

Queen's Gambit D64

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 Be7 5 Bg5 Nbd7 6 e3 0-0 7 Rc1 (7 Qc2!?) **7 ... c6 8 Qc2 a6** (8 ... Ne4!?) **9 a4**



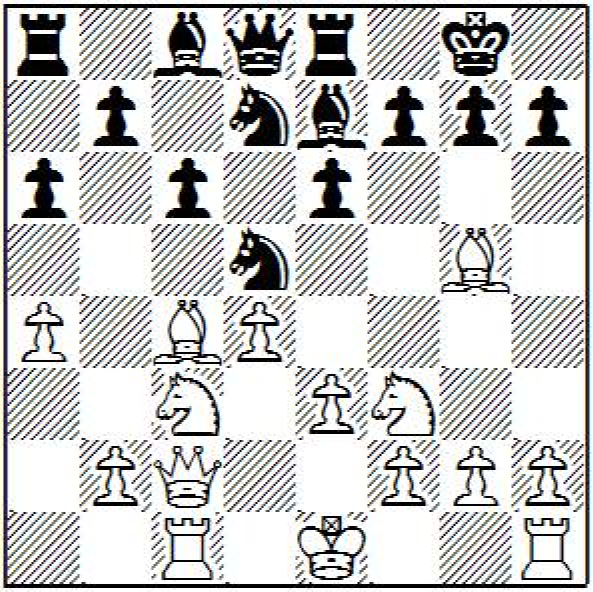
‘As this identical variation had yielded me a win the previous evening against Grünfeld, who played 9 a3 here, I wished to avoid fighting against the defence which I considered then, and still consider now, the best. This is the reason which decided me in favour of a2-a4, a move which Rubinstein, my present adversary, had adopted against me, without conspicuous success, in a similar position in the Hastings Tournament of 1922. The game continued as follows: 8 ... h6 9 Bh4 (9 Bf4!) 9 ... a6 10 a4 c5 11 Bd3 cxd4 12 exd4 dxc4 13 Bxc4 Nb6 14 Ba2 Nbd5 15 Bb1 Nb4 16 Qe2 Bd7 17 0-0 Bc6 18 Rfd1 Rc8 19 Ne5 Nfd5 20 Bg3 Bg5 21 f4! Bh4 22 Nxc6 Rxc6 23 Nxd5 Rxc1 24 Rxc1 Nxd5 25 Qe4 g6 26 Bxh4 Qxh4 27 f5? Qg5! and Black wins easily.’

9 ... Re8?!

Or 9 ... h6?! 10 Bf4! But, according to Alekhine, ‘the move 9 a4 cannot pretend to yield any advantage, since Black can answer it by 9 ... Ne4! with greater force than on the preceding move, White’s queenside being now slightly weak.’

10 Bd3 dxc4 11 Bxc4 Nd5

‘We now realise the idea conceived by Black – a fusion of the new defensive system (... a7-a6) with the old system (... dxc4 and ... Nd5), in the hope of thus profiting by the weakening of the square b4 created by the advance of White’s a-pawn.’ (Alekhine)



12 Bf4!

A move that characterises Alekhine's understanding of the problem of the centre. For the sake of opening lines and including another pawn in the battle for the e5-square, he is ready even to spoil his pawn structure.' (Kotov)

The idea of the d4 and f4 'horns' was also employed in a similar situation by Botvinnik – against Ragozin (Leningrad 1930) and Menchik (Hastings 1934/35). His commentary is no less interesting: 'White agrees to give up his bishop at f4 for the knight. On a dogmatic evaluation all the advantages will be on Black's side: the two bishops and a spoiled pawn formation for the opponent. But a concrete approach shows that White has a considerable lead in development and the opportunity for play in the centre, and these factors outweigh the others.'

12 ... Nxf4 13 exf4 c5

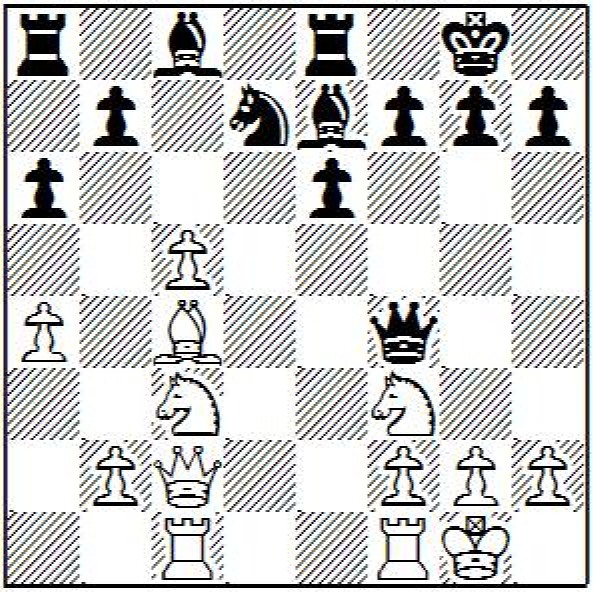
'This move, which goes against the general principle of not opening up fresh lines to a better-developed opponent, is dictated by the wish to eliminate White's troublesome pawn on f4.' (Alekhine) After 13 ... Nb6 14 Bd3 White would have retained some advantage.

14 dxc5 (but not 14 0-0? cxd4 15 Nxd4 Nb6) **14 ... Qc7 15 0-0!**

In the event of the mechanical 15 g3 Black would have solved all his problems: 15 ... Qc6 16 Be2 e5! etc.

15 ... Qxf4

'The capture of the c-pawn would also be insufficient to maintain equality, e.g. 15 ... Bxc5 16 Bd3 Nf6 17 Ne4! or 15 ... Nxc5 16 Ne5.' (Alekhine)



16 Ne4!

This pawn sacrifice is the only way for White to maintain his initiative and exploit his lead in the development. If 16 Ne2 Qh6 17 b4, then 17 ... a5!

16 ... Nxc5

‘If 16 ... Bxc5 17 Neg5 g6 (forced, since if 17 ... Nf8 White wins by 18 Bd3) 18 Rfe1! Nf6 19 g3 Qd6 20 Red1 Qe7 21 Ne5 with an overwhelming attack for White. The text move simplifies the game and allows Black some chances of salvation.’ (Alekhine) However, ‘better is 18 ... Nf8! (leaving the f6-square for the queen) with a perfectly defensible position.’ (Kotov)

17 Nxc5 Bxc5 18 Bd3 b6 (if 18 ... Bd6, then 19 Bxh7+ Kh8 20 Rfd1 with the threat of Rd4) **19 Bxh7+ Kh8?**

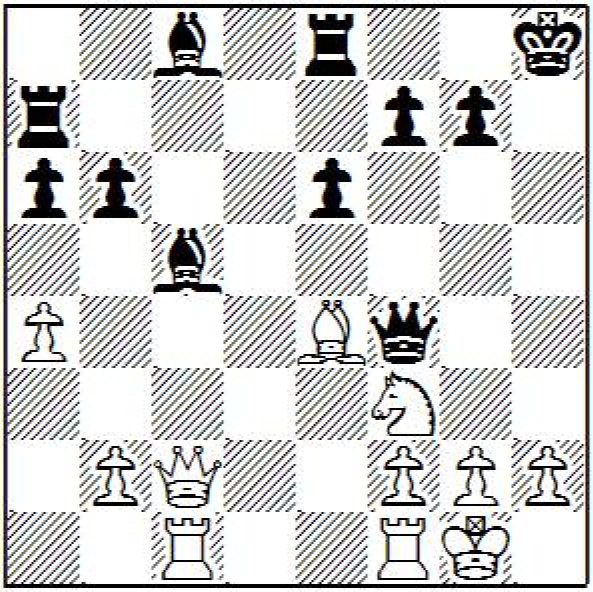
In Alekhine’s opinion, the decisive mistake, since ‘after 19 ... Kf8! it would have been very difficult for White to show how he could win, despite his positional superiority.’

20 Be4 Ra7?!

Of course, 20 ... Rb8 was better, ‘although in this case White would have obtained a decisive superiority by the following lines of play: 21 g3 Qd6 22 Rfd1 Qe7 23 Ne5 Qc7 24 Qc3! a5 25 Nc6 and 26 Qf3, winning for White, or 21 g3 Qf6 22 b4 Bd6 (else 23 Qc7! follows) 23 Rfd1 Qe7 24 Bc6 Rd8 25 Rd4 g6 26 Qd2! Kg7 27 Rd1 and White wins.’ (Alekhine)

Excuse me, but here there is the sobering 27 ... Bxb4!, and so instead of 27 Rd1? the computer suggests 27 Rh4! e5 (27 ... Rh8 28 Rxh8 Kxh8 29 Rd1! Bc7 30 Qh6+ Kg8 31 Ng5 etc.) 28 Qh6+ Kf6 29 Re1 winning.

On the other hand, instead of 25 ... g6?! Kotov recommended 25 ... Kg8! ‘and Black could still have defended.’ I think that after 26 Rcd1! this would have been with great difficulty: 26 ... Bc7 27 Rxd8+ Bxd8 28 Ne5 or 26 ... e5 27 Nxe5! Qxe5 28 Qd2, regaining the piece and remaining a pawn up.

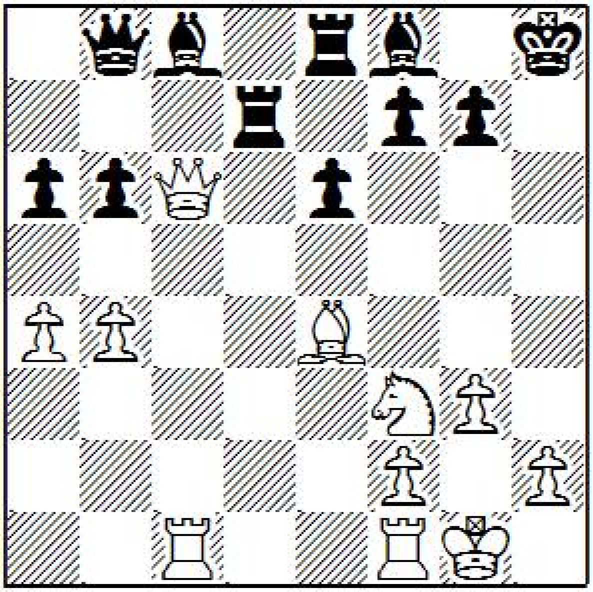


21 b4! (now White wins not only by force, but also very prettily) **21 ... Bf8** (21 ... Bxb4? 22 Qxc8!) **22 Qc6 Rd7 23 g3! Qb8**

After 23 ... Qd6, according to Alekhine White would have won by both 24 Qc4 Kg8 (24 ... Qe7 25 Ne5! Rd6 26 Bc6!) 25 Bc6 Rc7 26 Rfd1 Qe7 27 Qd3! and 24 Rfd1 Qxd1+ (24 ... Qxc6 25 Bxc6 Rxd1+ 26 Rxd1 Re7 27 Rd8) 25 Rxd1 Rxd1+ 26 Kg2 Bd7 27 Qxb6 Bxa4 28 Qxa6 Bd7 29 Ng5 Kg8 30 Qe2.

According to Kotov, ‘24 Rfd1 is unconvincing because of 24 ... Qe7! with possibilities of a defence,’ but, in my opinion, after 25 Ne5! these possibilities are close to zero.

However, after 23 ... Qb8 Black, who is pinned to the edge of the board, is struck by a sudden hurricane:



24 Ng5! (with the threat of 25 Nxf7+!) **24 ... Red8 25 Bg6!!**

The swiftest way of switching the queen to the h-file! The computer finds this stroke literally in seconds. The insipid 25 Bg2?! is parried by the same move 25 ... Qe5.

25 ... Qe5

Rubinstein decides to give up the exchange. If 25 ... fxg6 (25 ... Kg8 26 Qe4!; 25 ... Bb7 26 Qc4!), then 26 Qe4! Bd6 27 Qh4+ Kg8 28 Qh7+ Kf8 29 Qh8+ Ke7 30 Qxg7+ Ke8 31 Qg8+ Bf8 32 Qxg6+ Ke7 33 Qxe6 mate.

26 Nxf7+ Rxf7 27 Bxf7 Qf5 28 Rfd1! (in contrast to its heroic white opponent, the c8-bishop perishes without making a single move) **28 ... Rxd1+ 29 Rxd1 Qxf7 30 Qxc8 Kh7 31 Qxa6 Qf3 32 Qd3+! 1-0**

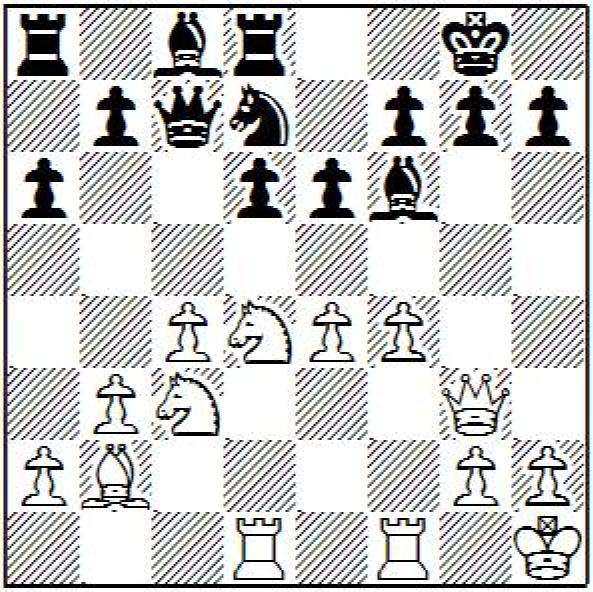
It was in Carlsbad 1923, in reply to a question by a Viennese journalist, that for the first time Alekhine expounded his creative credo: ‘I do not play chess – I fight at chess. Therefore I willingly combine the tactical with the strategic, the fantastic with the scientific, the combinative with the positional, and I aim to respond to the demands of each given position ... ’ Chigorin, too, would probably have been happy to sign his name to this ...

Here, incidentally, is another attractive example of combining the fantastic with the scientific, when a brilliant attack crowned some a great deal of preparatory work.

Game 122

A.Alekhine-F.Sämisch

Exhibition game, Berlin 1923



16 ... b6?

‘The decisive mistake; Black should have played 16 ... Kh8. But can Sämisch be reproached for this move? – after all, White wins with a combination which could have been foreseen only by a player possessing exceptional combinative flair.’ (Kotov)

17 f5! Be5?!

An attempt to strengthen the position by ... Nf6 (after the queen moves). No better was 17 ... Bxd4 18 Rxd4 Ne5 19 f6 Ng6 20 Ba3! (Alekhine), or 17 ... e5 18 Nd5 Qb7 19 Ne6!, but 17 ... Re8 was more tenacious (Kotov).

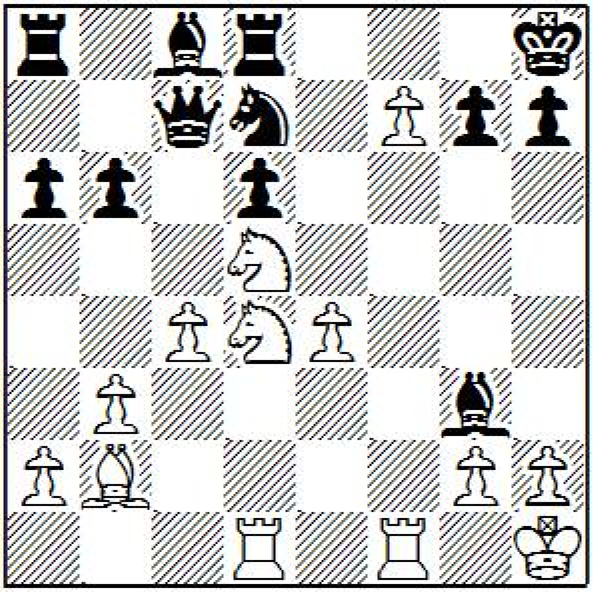
18 fxe6!!

A cold shower: sometimes the energy of the pieces is more important than a whole queen! Of course, White has no reason to play 18 Qh3 Nf6!, especially as 19 fxe6 fxe6 20 Nxe6? is not possible on account of 20 ... Qe7.

18 ... Bxg3 (18 ... fxe6 19 Nxe6 wins) **19 exf7+ Kh8 20 Nd5!! 1-0**

'The whole point of the sacrifice! 20 Ne6 would not be so good, because of 20 ... Qb8 21 Nd5 Be5 and Black could still defend himself, whereas after the text move he remains defenceless.' (Alekhine)

And here, with an extra queen and seemingly not a single defence, Black resigned! Apparently Sämisch flinched under the hail of diverse threats ... However, Alekhine's analysis shows that his somewhat premature decision was perfectly justified.



Black's queen has four moves, but not one of them saves him – in all variations the f7-pawn proves stronger than his strongest piece:

1) 20 ... Qb7 21 Ne6 Be5 (21 ... Rg8 22 fxg8Q+ Kxg8 23 Ne7+ Kh8 24 Bxg7 mate!) 22 Nxd8;

2) 20 ... Qc5 21 Ne6 Be5 22 Bxe5 dxe5 23 Nxc5 bxc5 24 Nc7 Rb8 25 Ne8!;

3) 20 ... Qa7 21 Nc6 Be5 22 Bxe5 dxe5 23 Nxa7 Rxa7 24 Nxb6 Rf8 25 Nxc8 Rxc8 26 Rxd7 and 27 f8Q+;

4) 20 ... Qb8 21 Nc6 Be5 (21 ... Qb7 22 Nxd8) 22 Bxe5 dxe5 23 Nxb8 Rxb8 24 Nc7! (with the threat of Ne8) 24 ... Rf8 25 Ne6 g6 26 Nxf8 (*or 26 b4! with the threat of c4-c5-c6 – G. K.*) 26 ... Nxf8 27 Rd8 and wins.

According to Kotov, 21 ... Bh4 is more tenacious, although even here after 22 Nxb8 Rxb8 23 g3 Bg5 24 h4 Bh6 25 g4! White has a decisive advantage. I would add 23 ... Bf6 24 Nxf6 gxf6 25 Rxd6! (simpler than 25 Rxf6) 25 ... Kg7 26 Rdxf6 Kf8 27 Ba3+ Nc5 28 Rxb6 Rxb6 29 Bxc5+ Rbd6 30 e5, or 26 Bxf6+ (Fritz) 26 ... Nxf6 27 Rxd8 Kxf7 28 Rd6 Be6 29 e5 winning.

Everywhere Black can only watch while the opponent strengthens his position, and therefore we will excuse Sämisch his unwillingness to be a silent witness to his own execution ...

In November Alekhine challenged Capablanca to a match for the second time, reminding him that on 1 January 1924 the time granted by the champion to Rubinstein in order to raise the necessary $10,000 would expire. And he set off on a tour of South America: it was time to announce himself on the ‘enemy’ continent, and also, in the words of the new challenger, ‘to discuss all the questions associated with the organisation of the match.’

This five-month tour by the ‘European champion’ went off very successfully, particular enthusiasm being provoked by his sensational blindfold simultaneous displays – he had set himself the aim of beating the records of Pillsbury and Breyer. But his chances of a match for the crown remained highly unclear. Especially after New York in the spring of 1924, where a tired Alekhine again, as in St Petersburg 1914, was unable to keep pace with Lasker and Capablanca (for the result of this double-round super-tournament, see p.216).

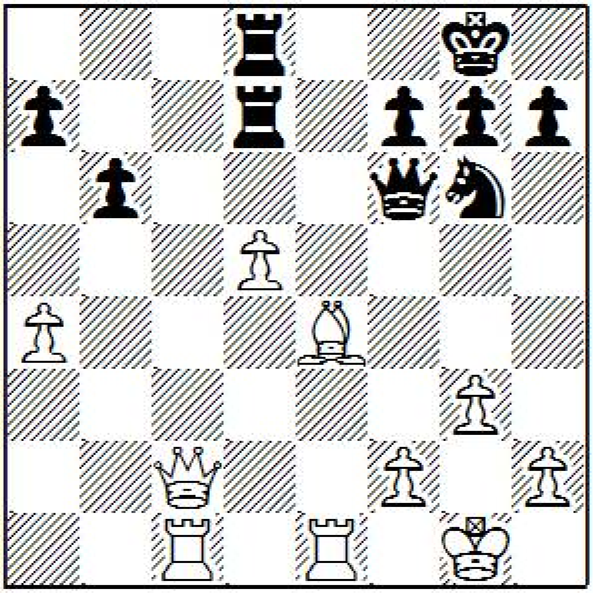
‘In the competitive sense I achieved a quite decent result, finishing immediately after the two world champions, which inwardly strengthened my claim,’ writes Alekhine, ‘but with the level of my mastery I remained completely dissatisfied ... Nevertheless I made one very comforting and unexpected discovery. In our first game Capablanca, although he outplayed me in the opening, achieved a winning position in the middlegame and retained the lion’s share of his advantage in a rook endgame, in the end he nevertheless missed a win and had to be satisfied with a draw. This makes one wonder, since Capablanca very much wanted to win, to try and catch Lasker ... I am sure that in Capablanca’s place I would definitely have won. In short, I had noticed in my opponent a little weakness: growing uncertainty in the fact of tenacious resistance! I had already noticed earlier that from time to time Capablanca committed small inaccuracies, but I did not suspect that he would be unable to free himself from this deficiency even when giving his all. This was an unusually important discovery for the future!'

Before setting off to Europe Alekhine did in fact establish a world record for blindfold play, playing 26 games simultaneously (+16 -5 =5). And on 1 February 1925 in Paris he raised this amazing record to 28 games (+22 -3 =3). There too he won a small double-round tournament: 1. Alekhine – 6½ out of 8; 2. Tartakower – 4½; 3-4. Znosko-Borovsky and Opocenský – 4; 5. Colle – 1.

Game 123

A.Alekhine-E.Colle

Paris 1925



28 Qc6! Qg5?

'Black is right in avoiding the exchange of queens as both 28 ... Qxc6 29 dxc6 and 28 ... Ne7 29 Qxf6 gxf6 30 d6! would be decidedly in White's favour. But strange as it may seem, the square g5 for the queen – which looks the most natural – will prove fatal. The right move was 28 ... Qd4, after which there would not be anything clear for White as yet.’ (Alekhine) And even more so after 28 ... Qd6!

29 Bxg6!

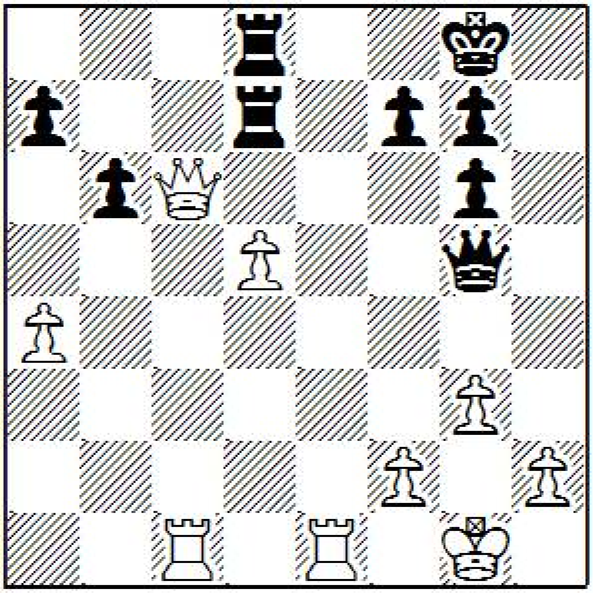
With his sharp tactical eye, Alekhine has noticed a weakness of the back rank.

29 ... hxg6?

‘Necessary was 29 ... fxg6 (of course not 29 ... Qxg6 30 Qxd7) 30 Qe6+ Rf7 (*30 ... Kf8 31 Rc4! – G. K.*) 31 Rc8 Rxc8 32 Qxc8+ Rf8 after which White would have had the pleasant choice between 33 Re8 Qf6 34 Rxf8+ Qxf8 35 Qc6 and 33 Qe6+ Kh8 34 d6 Qd2 35 Re2 Qc1+ 36 Kg2 Qc6+ 37 Kh3 most likely winning in either case.’ (Alekhine)

Let us check the first of these: 35 ... Qd8 36 d6 Kf7 37 Qc4+ Kf8 38 Qc7 Ke8 39 Qxg7 Qxd6 40 Qg8+ Kd7 41 Qxh7+ Kc6, and now not 42 Qxa7? Qd1+ 43 Kg2 Qd5+ 44 f3 Qd2+ 45 Kh3 Qh6+ with perpetual check, but 42 h4! winning.

But what is bad about the text move, which opens an escape square at h7? It turns out that this is not enough: a move earlier Black himself constructed a trap for his king.



30 Qxd7!!

Despite everything! ‘This queen’s sacrifice is only possible because Black’s g5 is occupied by the queen.’ (Alekhine)

30 ... Rxd7 31 Re8+ Kh7 32 Rcc8 Rd8 33 Rexd8! 1-0

After this there followed a triumph in the outstandingly strong Baden-Baden 1925 (55 years after Anderssen's triumph!): 1. Alekhine – 16 out of 20 (undefeated); 2. Rubinstein – 14½; 3. Sämisch – 13½; 4. Bogoljubow – 13; 5-6. Marshall and Tartakower – 12½; 7. I. Rabinovich – 12; 8. Grünfeld – 11½; 9. Nimzowitsch – 11; 10. Torre – 10½; 11-13. Réti, Treybal and Spielmann – 10 etc.

After a draw with Torre in the first round Alekhine won nine games in a row, including wins with Black against Tarrasch, Nimzowitsch and Réti. The last of these was so good, that to this day the chess world admires this unsurpassed masterpiece.

As I have already described, in the early 1920s Réti threw down a challenge to the classical school with his 'crooked' opening 1 Nf3, 2 g3 and c2-c4, believing passionately in the effectiveness of undermining the centre and in the strength of fianchettoed bishops. This novel method proved successful even against the most powerful opponents, including Rubinstein (Game No.96) and Capablanca (Game No.97), who lost the thread of the game due to unfamiliarity with those types of position. Later Réti's opening was employed by both Capa and Alekhine, and many others, and nowadays it occurs frequently in tournaments of any standard. And there are few who, when playing 1 Nf3, think of how in such torment the truth was born more than three quarters of a century ago ...

Game 124

R.Réti-A.Alekhine

Baden-Baden 1925

Réti Opening A00

1 g3 (instead of his favourite 1 Nf3!) **1 ... e5! 2 Nf3**

'An experiment which Réti never repeated after the present game. White intends to play the Alekhine's Defence with colours reversed, i.e. with one tempo more. But the way he uses that tempo (g2-g3) could have turned to his disadvantage.' (Alekhine)

But here is an experiment from the second half of the 20th century: 2 Bg2 d5 3 Nf3 e4 4 Nd4 c5 5 Nb3 c4 6 Nd4 Bc5 7 c3 Nc6 (7 ... Qb6 8 d3!) 8

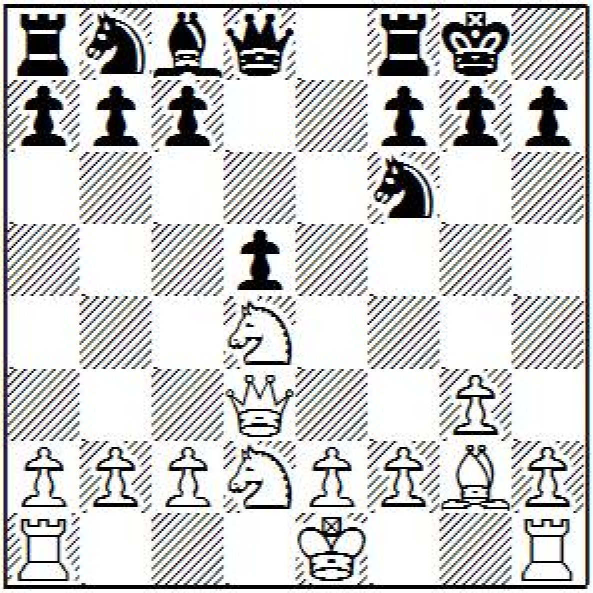
Nxc6 bxc6 9 0-0 Ne7 (or 9 ... Nf6 10 b3) 10 b3! Ba6 11 Ba3! Qb6 12 bxc4 Bxc4 13 Bxc5 Qxc5 14 d3 exd3 15 exd3 Ba6 16 Re1 0-0 17 d4 Qd6 18 Nd2 with a slight positional plus for White (Larsen-Donner, Zürich 1959).

2 ... e4 3 Nd4 d5

As Alekhine put it, Black is satisfied with free development and roughly equal chances, although by 3 ... c5! 4 Nb3 c4 5 Nd4 Bc5 6 c3 Nc6 he could have demonstrated the entire absurdity of such ‘development’ by White. But Larsen (see above) did not agree with this!

4 d3 exd3 5 Qxd3 Nf6 6 Bg2 Bb4+ (it is not altogether clear whether Black should aim for the exchange of the dark-squared bishops) **7 Bd2 Bxd2+ 8 Nxd2 0-0**

In the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings* (1979) 8 ... Nbd7 9 c4 c5?! 10 N4b3 d4 was recommended ‘with advantage to Black’, but after the interposition of 10 Qe3+! he is prevented from castling.



9 c4! Na6

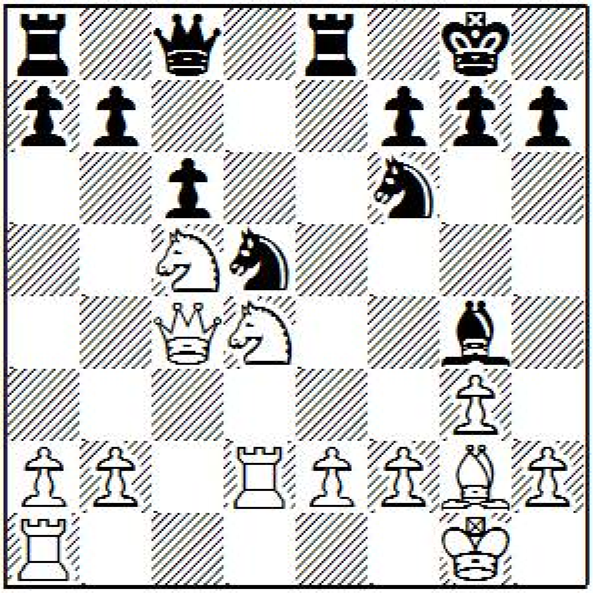
‘Apart from his eccentric first move, Réti plays the opening very well; Black would not have any advantage by answering 9 ... c5 because of 10 N4b3 threatening both 11 Nxc5 and 11 cxd5.’ (Alekhine)

10 cxd5 Nb4 11 Qc4 Nbxd5 12 N2b3 c6 13 0-0 Re8 14 Rfd1 Bg4 15 Rd2

After 15 h3 Black was intending 15 ... Bh5 and ... Bg6-e4, to neutralise the powerful bishop at g2. He also aims for this in the game.

15 ... Qc8 16 Nc5

White pursues his own course.



16 ... Bh3! 17 Bf3

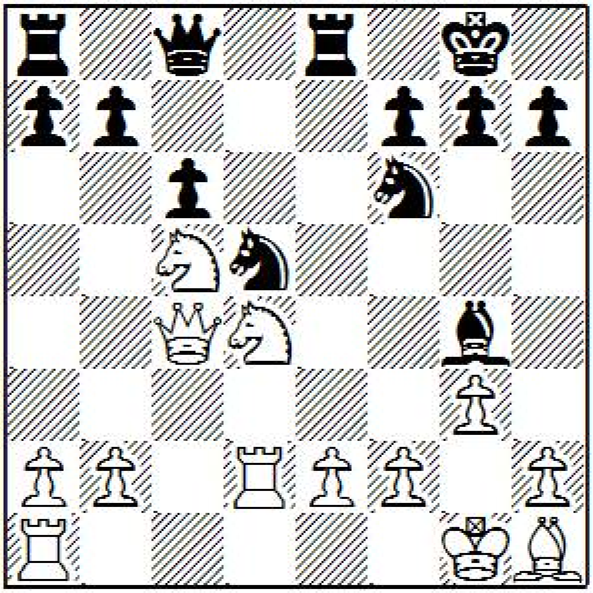
As usual, Alekhine’s plan is based on tactical nuances: 17 Bxh3 Qxh3 18 Nxb7? is not possible in view of 18 ... Ng4 19 Nf3 Nde3! 20 fxe3 Nxe3 21 Qxf7+ Kh8! 22 Nh4 Rf8 winning.

17 ... Bg4 18 Bg2 Bh3 19 Bf3 Bg4

A subtle psychological calculation: Alekhine tacitly offers a draw, knowing perfectly well that for this opponent to avoid a fight with White at such an early stage would be equivalent to a moral defeat. But it is also uncomfortable for White to exchange his strong bishop ...

20 Bh1?!

Take note, this is an historic moment! ‘Had Réti played 20 Bg2, the game would have ended in a draw by repetition and we would not have seen a brilliant combination ... Fickle fortune rules in chess, though is this true only of chess?’ (Kotov)

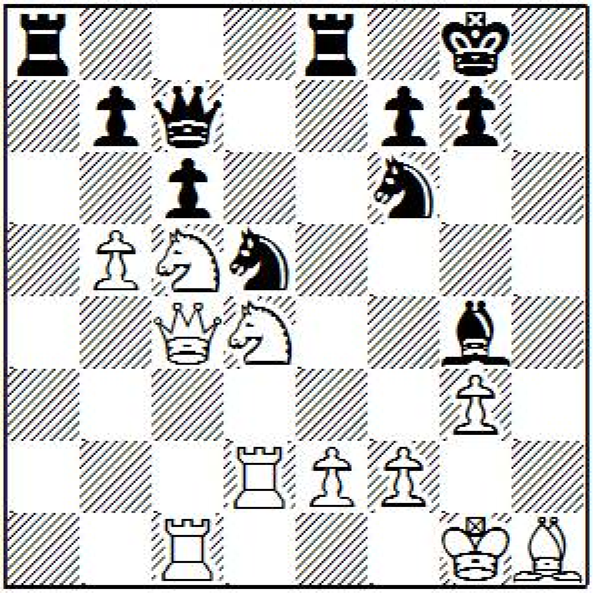


20 ... h5! (signalling the start of a direct attack on the king: first the g3-point has to be weakened) **21 b4 a6 22 Rc1 h4 23 a4 hxg3 24 hxg3 Qc7 25 b5**

‘Consequent, but very risky to say the least.’ (Alekhine) 25 e4 was much safer, when Black was intending 25 ... Nb6 and ... Nbd7! with sufficient counterplay. But Réti, of course, did not want to block the h1-a8 diagonal of his favourite bishop.

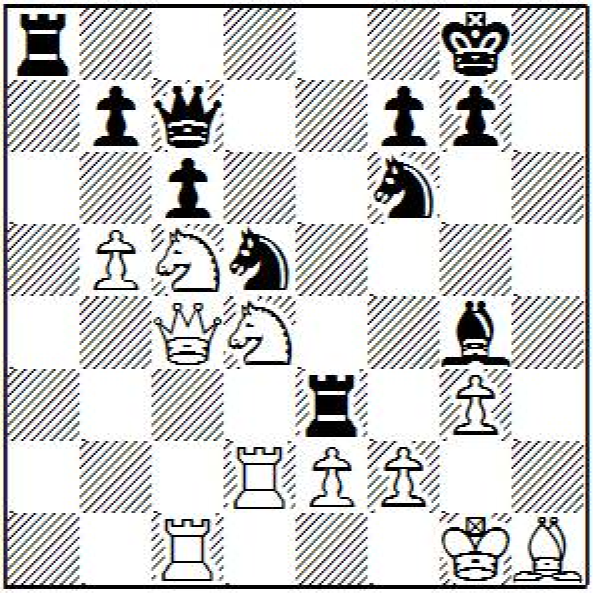
25 ... axb5 26 axb5

It appears that White’s strategy has triumphed: he is about to give the opponent a weak pawn, which will be bound to fall. But Alekhine finds a resource that radically changes the picture.



26 ... Re3!

‘It seems almost incredible that this spectacular move not only stops White’s attack but even brings him serious trouble.’ (Alekhine) His king suddenly finds itself in difficulties: 27 fxe3?? Qxg3+ 28 Bg2 Nxe3, and 27 ... Rxg3+ is threatened. And Réti, unable to withstand Alekhine’s pressure, flinches ... fortunately for the chess world!



27 Nf3?

Strangely enough, this is already an irreparable mistake. 27 Bg2?! Rxg3! 28 e3 (not 28 fxg3? Ne3 29 Qd3 Qxg3) is dubious in view of 28 ... Qe5!, when neither 29 bxc6? Nxe3! 30 fxe3 Qxe3+ nor 29 fxg3? Qxe3+ 30 Rf2 cxb5! 31 Nxb5 Be2 32 Qc2 Ng4 is possible, while if 29 Qd3 Black has 29 ... Rxg2+! 30 Kxg2 b6!! 31 Ncb3 (31 Nxc6 Qh5) 31 ... Nb4 (31 ... c5!?) 32 Qb1 c5 winning.

‘Also insufficient was 27 Kh2 because of 27 ... Raa3! 28 Ncb3 (not 28 fxe3 Nxe3 followed by ... Nf1+ etc.) 28 ... Qe5! 29 bxc6 bxc6 with a powerful attack as 30 fxe3 would still be bad because of 30 ... Qh5+ followed by 31 ... Qh3.’ (Alekhine) However, no quick win is apparent: 32 Bxd5 Nxd5 33 Nf3 Qxg3+ 34 Kh1 Bxf3+ 35 exf3 Qxf3+ 36 Kh2 Qxe3 37 Qxc6 Rxb3 38 Qc8+ Kh7 39 Qf5+ Kh6 40 Rc6+ f6 etc. But, of course, better is 30 Bf3! Bxf3 31 exf3! (threatening fxe3 or Qxc6), parrying the attack.

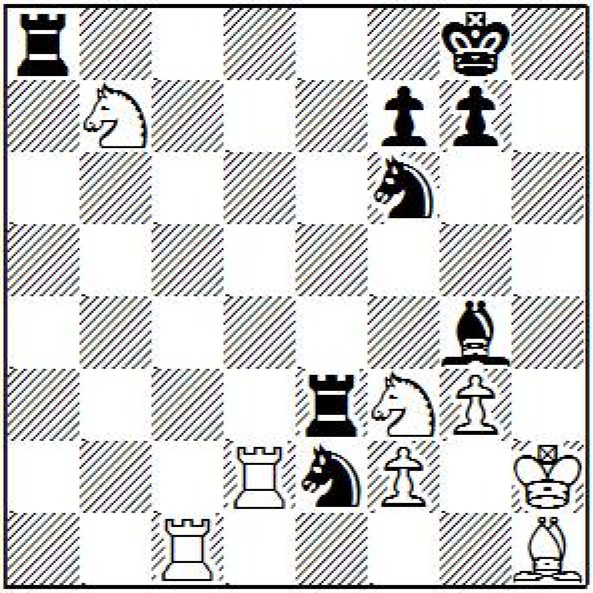
‘The only chance of salvation was 27 Bf3! Bxf3 28 exf3! cxb5 29 Nxb5 Qa5! still with advantage for Black, as 30 Rxd5 would lose immediately after 30 ... Re1+ 31 Rxe1 Qxe1+ 32 Kg2 Ra1.’ (Alekhine) Here there is obviously some misunderstanding: after 33 Rd8+ Kh7 34 Qh4+ Kg6 35 f4! it is not White who loses, but Black! And if 32 ... Nxd5 (instead of 32 ... Ra1?) 33 Qxd5 Ra1, then it is a draw: 34 Qd8+ Kh7 35 Qh4+. Also in the event of 30 Rdd1 Re7 31 Nd6 it is hard to speak of any advantage for Black.

27 ... cxb5! (the start of a typhoon that sweeps almost all the pieces from the board) **28 Qxb5 Nc3! 29 Qxb7** (29 Qc4? b5! and ... Nxe2+) **29 ... Qxb7**

‘And not 29 ... Nxe2+ because of 30 Rxe2! Qxb7 31 Rxe3! with some saving chances for White.’ (Alekhine)

30 Nxb7 Nxe2+ 31 Kh2

After 31 Kf1 Alekhine gives 31 ... Nxg3+ 32 fxg3 Bxf3 33 Bxf3 Rxf3+ 34 Kg2 Raa3 35 Rd8+ Kh7 36 Rh1+ Kg6 37 Rh3 Rfb3! winning.



Can Black really count on anything serious? After all, both 31 ... Nxc1 32 fxe3 Ra3 and 31 ... Rxf3 32 Rxe2 Rxg3 33 Kxg3 Bxe2, although they win a pawn, leave White with serious chances of a draw ...

31 ... Ne4!!

‘The beginning of a new combination – which, however, is the absolutely logical consequence of the previous manoeuvres – aiming, after a series of twelve practically forced moves, at the capture of White’s exposed knight at b7.’ (Alekhine)

But what a knight move! The audacious black rook has already been en prise for six moves!

‘It was Alekhine’s stamina that carried him to victory. It was in the most complicated positions that Alekhine found his greatest concepts.’ (Fischer).

32 Rc4!?

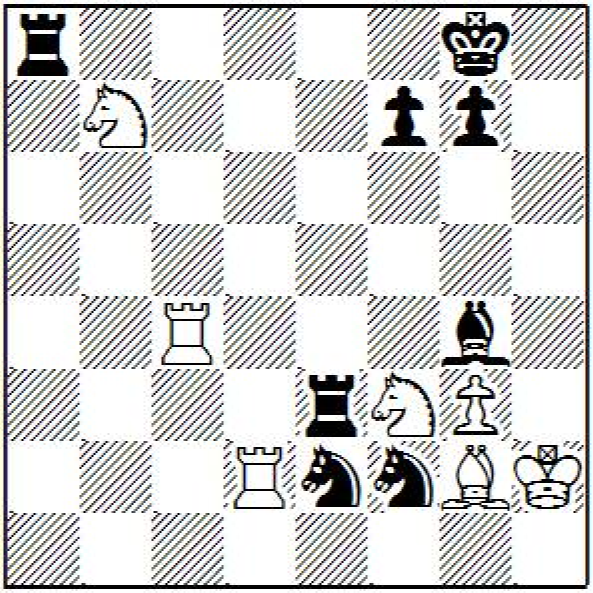
A desperate tactical trick! Alekhine and Kotov attach an exclamation mark to this move, calling it the best defence. 32 fxe3? Nxd2 is clearly bad, while after 32 Rd8+ Rxd8 33 fxe3 Rd5! 34 Rc4 N2xg3 Black is a pawn up with a decisive attack, for example: 35 Bg2 Nf1+! 36 Kh1 Rd1 37 Rd4 Neg3+ 38 Kg1 Nd2+ etc.

32 ... Nxf2

A simple refutation: Black picks up the key f2-pawn and maintains all his threats. Réti was cherishing hopes of 32 ... Nxd2? 33 Nxd2! Rd3 34 Nc5! equalising or at least 32 ... Bxf3?! 33 Rxe4!! Bxe4 (or 33 ... Rxe4 34 Bxf3) 34 fxe3 Bxh1 35 Kxh1 with drawing chances.

33 Bg2

Black is now obviously winning, but see how he does this:



33 ... Be6!

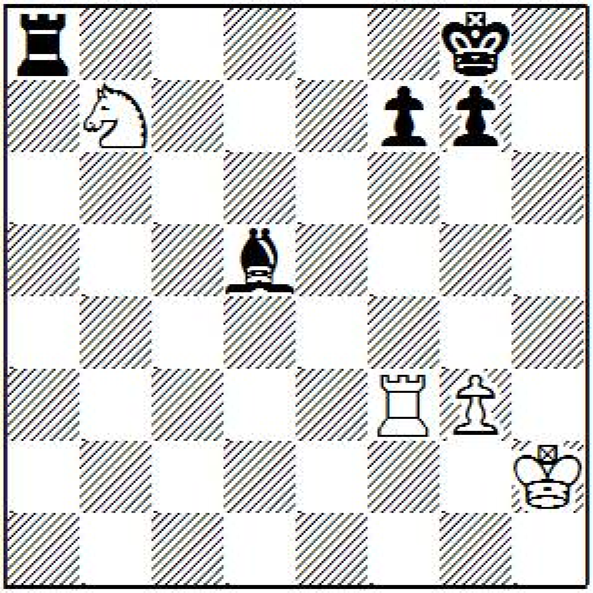
An essential link of the combination! It is easy to see that White has no choice.

34 Rcc2 Ng4+ 35 Kh3 (35 Kh1 Ra1+) **35 ... Ne5+ 36 Kh2** (36 Kh4 Ra4+) **36 ... Rxf3! 37 Rxe2 Ng4+ 38 Kh3**

And again after 38 Kh1 there would have followed a deadly rook check.

38 ... Ne3+ 39 Kh2 Nxc2 40 Bxf3 Nd4! 0-1

After 41 Rf2 (or 41 Re3) 41 ... Nxf3+ 42 Rxf3 Bd5! – the final blow! – he loses his errant knight. In my opinion, this geometric position deserves a separate diagram:



Analysis diagram

A real diamond, one of the most brilliant games in the history of chess, which has won the hearts of millions. Alekhine considered both this game and the one against Bogoljubow in Hastings 1922 as the best in his career. And, by a strange coincidence, they did not receive any awards, since at neither tournament were there any brilliancy prizes ...

Alekhine’s victory in Baden-Baden made an enormous impression on the chess world. I will give only two typical opinions by famous participants in the tournament.

Tarrasch: ‘In not one game did Alekhine have even an inferior position. His victory in this extremely strong tournament, one of the most brilliant in history, shows that he has every reason to fight for the world championship ... A comparison of Capablanca’s games, played in New York, with the Baden-Baden games of Alekhine from the standpoint of strategic accuracy, correctness of play and consistency in the conduct of attack, is undoubtedly in favour of Alekhine. The world champion has acquired a formidable opponent, improving from year to year, and it is doubtful whether Capablanca will be able to barricade himself for long from a match with Alekhine with the gold wall of $10,000.’

Tartakower: ‘We are witnessing a wonderful mystery: the hopes of the great Chigorin are beginning at last to be fulfilled. And if Morphy was the poet of chess, Steinitz – the fighter, Lasker – the philosopher, and Capablanca – the wonder-machine, then Alekhine, in keeping with the eternally restless and self-torturing Russian spirit, is showing himself increasingly to be the seeker of chess truth ... Capablanca has the title, Lasker has the results, but only Alekhine has the style of a real world champion.'

And this is what Alekhine himself thought about his performance in Baden-Baden: 'The tournament showed me that I was stronger than all the masters who played in it. But in what way was I still inferior to Capablanca? I had not yet rid myself of two defects. The first was excessive dogmatism, that is a striving without fail to fully exploit small advantages that had been gained, which deprived my play of the required flexibility. The second was still imperfect technique in the transition from the middlegame to the most favourable endgame ... But from the standpoint of general chess technique and methods I already then felt myself to be fully equal with Capablanca's strength.'

Alas, he was not invited to the second major tournament of the year, Moscow 1925. The all-union chess section headed by the chairman of the Supreme Tribunal Nikolai Krylenko 'did not consider it possible to enter into any discussions with Alekhine about his participation in the international tournament in Moscow, considering this master to be an element alien and hostile to the Soviet authorities.' So there you have it!

However, the grandmaster used the resulting respite to his advantage: he again got married and in the autumn of 1925 he also prepared and defended his dissertation on the theme 'The system of imprisonment in China' at the Sorbonne – and he became a Doctor of Law.

The following year, 1926, was spent preparing for the match with Capablanca. Perfecting his style, Alekhine won tournaments in Hastings, Scarborough and Birmingham, and was second in Semmering (after Spielmann) and Dresden (after Nimzowitsch). But the main thing was that he made a staggeringly successful voyage to South America, where the Argentine Government undertook to guarantee the financial basis of a match for the world champion demanded by the London agreement. Then he, in his own words, 'again sent a challenge to Capablanca, although I did not immediately receive a definite reply, and in early 1927 the question of the match remained open.'

Buenos Aires through the Eyes of Alekhine

In the winter (1926/27) he played a training match in Holland with the improving Max Euwe and prevailed only by a miracle, after a dramatic win in the final, 10th game: 5½-4½ (+3 -2 =5). Alekhine reached dubious positions, made uncharacteristic oversights, and in the seventh game he even blundered a piece in a winning position ... What told was both fatigue after the South American tour, and the new, uncustomary time control – 40 moves in 2½ hours (which became standard right up to the end of the 1980s), and nervousness over the long-awaited match with Capablanca, who was delaying giving a definite reply.

In February Alekhine arrived for the super-tournament in New York, where he, Capablanca and the Argentine organisers finally reached an agreement about the match. The tournament itself was won by the champion, 2½ points ahead of the challenger, who took second place (for the result of New York 1927, cf. p.307). 'Today he [Alekhine] has what is perhaps the best rounded game of all masters,' Capa said diplomatically before the start, and after the finish he added: 'He showed himself without doubt the strongest of our competitors.'

Alekhine was unhappy with his form, but full of optimism: 'As a prologue to the battle for the world championship, New York 1927 was of great and very real significance, although completely contradictory to that which the chess world thought about this event: fortune endowed the Cuban hero with an ambiguous smile, in which behind outward approval was concealed a cautious warning, but her favourite, alas, was unable to see through this smile. And in addition, the tournament allowed his future opponent, immediately before the decisive battle, to test in a number of new examples his observations of the past years and to come therefore to the correct conclusions.'

A couple of months before the match, the challenger thoroughly limbered up in Kecskemet (12 out of 16, undefeated), and in the very first game of the historic battle in Buenos Aires, on 16th September, he knocked out the champion with Black! I should remind you that the winner was the first to score six wins and Capa quickly 'put his house in order' by winning the third and seventh games. It appeared that everything was back in place, but at this moment Alekhine created a fantastic 'double'.

Game 125

J.R.Capablanca-A.Alekhine

World Championship Match, Buenos Aires 1927, 11th game

Queen's Gambit D52

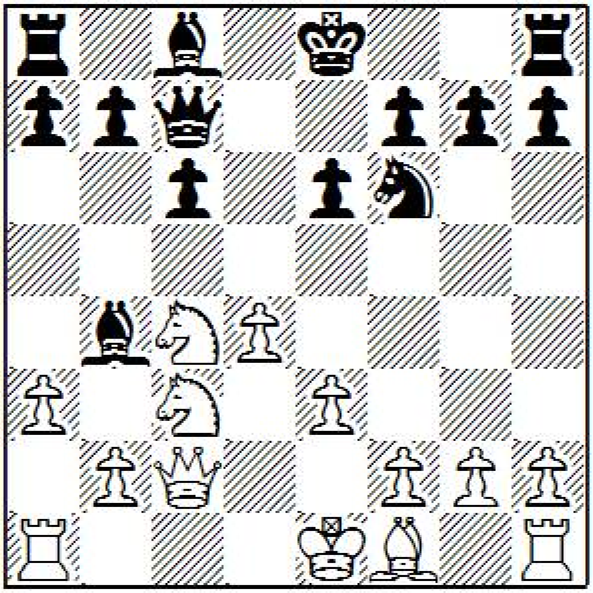
1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Nbd7 5 e3 c6 6 Nf3 Qa5 7 Nd2 Bb4 8 Qc2 dxc4!?

Running repairs to the Cambridge Springs: in the seventh game 8 ... 0-0 9 Bh4!? was played (*Game No.104*).

9 Bxf6 Nxf6 10 Nxc4 Qc7

A problematic situation: White has a spatial advantage, whereas Black has the two bishops and promising counterplay. Nowadays positions of this type are very popular – for example, in the Moscow Variation: 4 Nf3 c6 5 Bg5 h6 6 Bxf6 Qxf6 7 e3 Nd7 8 Bd3 dxc4 9 Bxc4 Bd6 10 0-0 Qe7 11 Ne4 Bc7 followed by ... 0-0, ... Rd8, ... Nf8 and ... Bd7-e8 (as Dreev often plays). But at that time this was a step forward, a revelation: after all, Black concedes the centre! But in contrast, say, to the 11th game of the Capablanca-Lasker match (*Game No.91*) he has compensation for this in the form of the two bishops.

11 a3!?



A mini-novelty; previously the f1-bishop was developed immediately. This was also done later: 11 Be2 (11 g3!?) 11 ... 0-0 12 0-0 Rd8 (12 ... Bd7!?; 12 ... b6!? 13 Rac1 Bb7 14 Bf3 Rac8) 13 Rad1 Nd5 14 Ne4 Be7 15 a3 b6 16 Bd3 Bb7 17 Rc1 Rac8 18 b4 h6 19 Qb3 Nf6 (Bogoljubow-Alekhine, Germany/Holland 10th matchgame 1929), or 13 a3 Be7 14 b4 b6 15 Rfd1 Nd5 (Mikenas-Alekhine, Prague Olympiad 1931) with equal chances in each case.

11 ... Be7 12 Be2 (in the 29th game 12 g3! was played – *Game No.106*) **12 ... 0-0**

‘12 ... c5 would still be premature because of 13 Nb5 Qd8 14 dxc5 Bxc5 15 b4 Be7 16 Na5 etc. with a clear advantage.’ (Alekhine)

13 0-0 (if 13 b4 there is the typical 13 ... Nd5 14 0-0 Bd7, then ... Rfd8 and ... Be8) **13 ... Bd7**

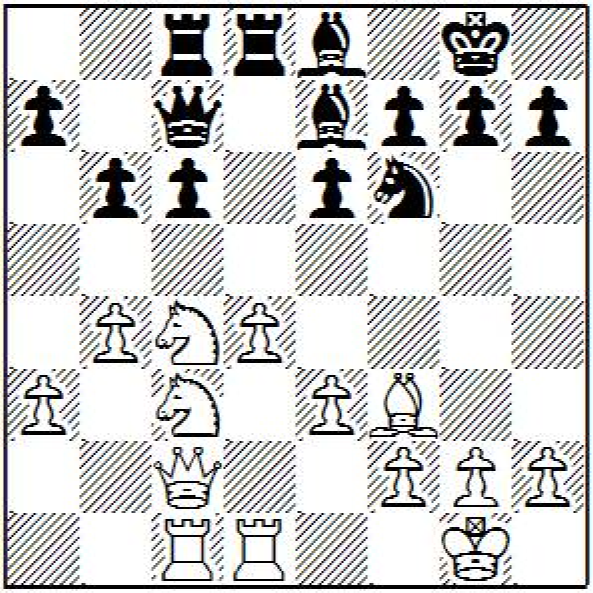
‘This creates a number of difficulties. 13 ... c5 was better.’ (Kotov) Say, 14 dxc5 Qxc5 15 b4 Qc7 and Black soon frees himself. But Alekhine considered 13 ... c5?! ‘inadvisable for analogous reasons’: 14 Nb5! Qd8 15 dxc5 Bxc5 16 b4 etc.

14 b4 b6 (according to Alekhine, first 14 ... Rfd8 and ... Be8 was safer) **15 Bf3!** (if 15 Rfd1 Black was planning 15 ... a5! 16 bxa5 b5) **15 ... Rac8**

‘If now 15 ... a5 then 16 Ne5! axb4 17 Nb5 etc. with the advantage.’ (Alekhine)

16 Rfd1 Rfd8 17 Rac1 Be8

A critical situation!



Capablanca, enslaved by traditional concepts, evaluated this position in favour of White: ‘He has all the preconditions for winning the game, so that the system of development chosen by Black is bad.’

But here is a more modern evaluation: ‘Alekhine has set up a position in the spirit of Steinitz, and the lurking black bishops are awaiting the opening of diagonals. Therefore Capablanca mounts a slow attack in the centre and on the flanks.’ (Bronstein) Of course, Capa arranges his pieces competently, but it would appear that the resulting position is not to his taste and Alekhine subtly sensed this.

18 g3

‘A good positional move, the immediate object of which is to prevent the answer ... Qf4 in case of e3-e4.’ (Alekhine)

18 ... Nd5 19 Nb2

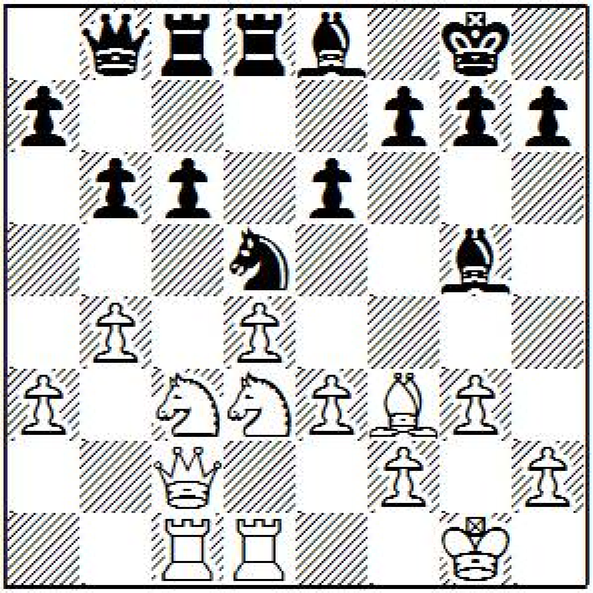
White manoeuvres, cunningly transferring his knight to d3 to prevent the unpleasant undermining move ... c6-c5. Black also does not hurry, but moves here and there ... One senses the class of the two opponents: a battle of ‘heavyweights’!

19 ... Qb8

With the idea of ... Nxc3 and ... c6-c5. According to Alekhine, ‘more exact was the immediate 19 ... Qb7, keeping in mind the possibility of ... Qa6.’

20 Nd3 Bg5

‘Introducing fresh tactical threats.’ (Levenfish, Romanovsky) White has to defend against 21 ... Nxe3 22 fxe3 Bxe3+ 23 Kh1 Bxc1 and ... Rxd4.



21 Rb1 Qb7 (now 21 ... Nxe3? is unfavourable and especially 21 ... Bxe3? 22 Bxd5!) **22 e4** (sooner or later this had to be played) **22 ... Nxc3 23 Qxc3 Qe7?!**

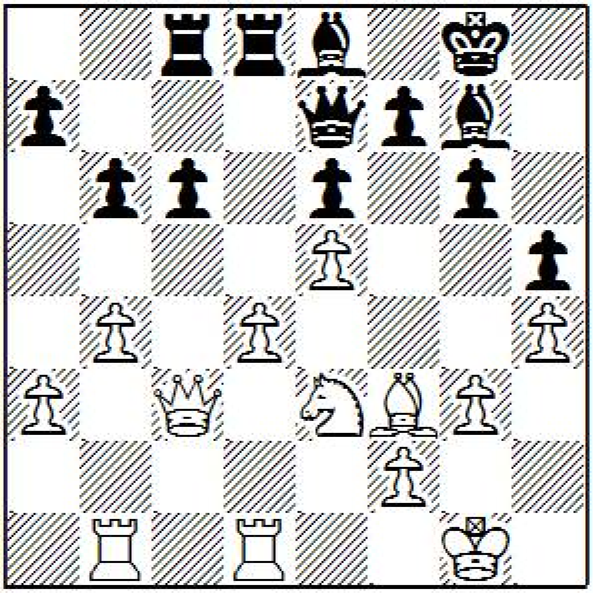
I agree with Alekhine: ‘Disadvantageous, as his king’s bishop will now be put temporarily out of play. Correct was 23 ... Rc7 and if 24 Bg2 then 24 ... Bf6 25 e5 Be7 26 Rbc1 Qc8, after which Black could quietly wait for further developments.’

24 h4! Bh6 25 Ne5 (with the threat of 26 Ng4) **25 ... g6 26 Ng4?!**

Returning the compliment. ‘Now it is White’s turn to miss the best move! After 26 Nc4! Bg7 (*26 ... b5? 27 Ne3 – G. K.*) 27 e5 h5 28 Nd6 Black would have nothing better than to start to fight for a draw by sacrificing the exchange for a pawn: 28 ... Rxd6 29 exd6 Qxd6 30 Qc4! etc. with a clear advantage.’ (Alekhine) In my opinion, 30 Rbc1 is also good.

It is significant that Capablanca underestimated the latent dynamics of this position and nevertheless was unable to prevent ... c6-c5. In this match he generally sensed dynamics worse than his opponent and played more static chess, trying to break up large-scale problems into small ones and to solve them easily by parts.

26 ... Bg7 27 e5 (27 Ne3? c5) **27 ... h5** (but not 27 ... c5? 28 bxc5 bxc5 29 Rb7 Qf8 30 Rc1 winning a pawn) **28 Ne3**



28 ... c5!

The dreams are realised! 'Black profits by the great opportunity to free at last his queen's bishop.' (Alekhine)

29 bxc5 (or 29 dxc5 bxc5 30 Rxd8 Qxd8 31 bxc5 Qc7 equalising) **29 ... bxc5 30 d5?**

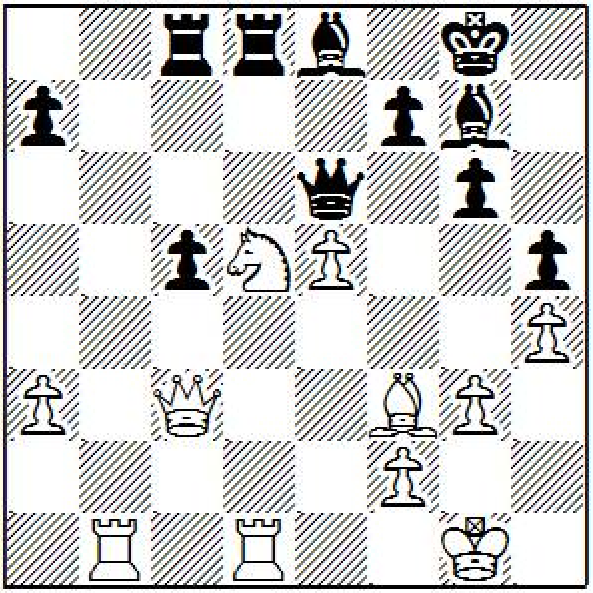
'This attempt to complicate matters – most unusual for Capablanca – turns decidedly to Black's advantage. An easy draw was obtainable by 30 Rb7 Rd7 31 Rxd7 (*31 Rdb1 Qd8 – G. K.*) 31 ... Bxd7 32 d5 (or 32 dxc5 Be8 33 c6 Qc7 34 Qc5 Bxe5) 32 ... exd5 33 Nxd5 Qe6 34 Nf4 Bxe5 followed by a general liquidation and bishops of different colours.' (Alekhine) That is, 35 Nxe6 Bxc3 36 Rxd7 fxe6 etc. Also possible is 30 ... Rc7 31 Rxc7 Qxc7 32 Rc1 Rc8 with approximate equality.

30 ... exd5 31 Nxd5

After 31 Rxd5 Rxd5 32 Nxd5 Qe6 33 Rb7 (Bernstein) there is 33 ... Bxe5 34 Qc4 Kg7 35 Rxa7 Bd4 with advantage to Black (Levenfish, Romanovsky).

31 ... Qe6

Of course, not 31 ... Qxe5? 32 Qxe5 Bxe5 because of 33 Ne7+. But now White has definite problems.



32 Nf6+

A check that was condemned by all the commentators. 'Comparatively better was 32 Rb7 Bxe5 33 Qa5 Kg7 34 Rxa7 and Black's advantage – the pair of bishops – would not yet have been decisive.' (Alekhine) However, it seems to me that after 34 ... Bc6! he has too dominating a position and that Capa was right to give the knight check, at least trying to create some counterplay.

32 ... Bxf6 33 exf6 Rxd1+ 34 Rxd1 Bc6!

'A quiet and very strong move.' (Bronstein) 'White cannot exchange the bishops, as in that case he would lose his only pride – the pawn at f6.' (Alekhine)

35 Re1

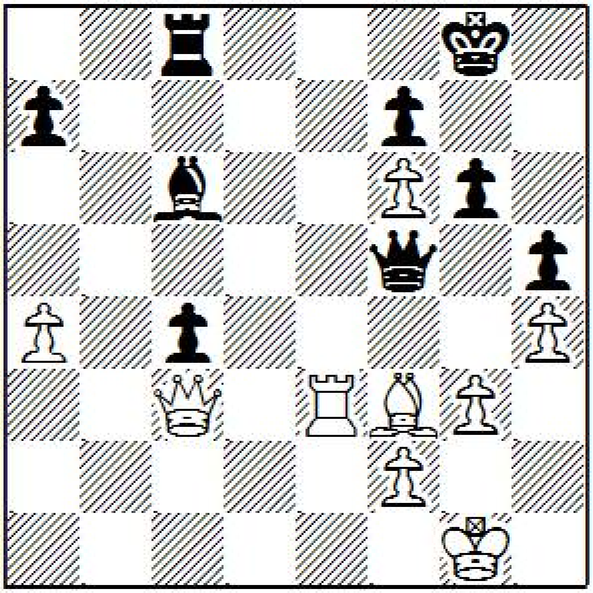
And yet 35 Bxc6 came into consideration. The commentators rejected it because of 35 ... Rxc6 (after 35 ... Qxc6!? Black's advantage is slight) 36 Rd8+ (36 Rc1 c4) 36 ... Kh7, not noticing the idea of 37 Qd2! (threatening

38 Rh8+! Kxh8 39 Qh6+ and mate) 37 ... Qxf6 38 Rd7 with counterplay, sufficient to regain the pawn: 38 ... Kg7! (38 ... c4 39 Qd5 Kg7 40 Rxf7+!; 38 ... Ra6 39 Qd5 Kg7 40 Qxc5 Qa1+ 41 Kg2 Qxa3 42 Qd4+!) 39 Qd5 Rc8 40 Rxa7, and although after 40 ... c4 41 Ra5 White has a rather unpleasant position, nevertheless things are closer to a draw.

Capa's psychological problem was that in all variations Black retains winning chances. I think that he grew nervous: he was trying to find where it was possible to save himself, and where it wasn't ...

35 ... Qf5 36 Re3 (36 Bxc6?! Rxc6 37 Re5 Qxf6 wins for Black) **36 ... c4!** (seizing space and planning ... a7-a5-a4) **37 a4?**

A more than dubious pawn sacrifice. 'Realising the inferiority of his position, White begins to "swindle".' (Alekhine)



37 ... a5?

One senses the enormous nervous tension! Following Alekhine's example, everyone attaches an exclamation mark to this time-trouble move, apparently after heeding his warning: 'If 37 ... Bxa4, then 38 Be4 Qg4 (38 ... Qd7 39 Rf3 Kh7 40 Qe5 etc. would even lose) 39 Bf3 Qd7 40 Re7 Qd3 41 Qxd3 cxd3 42 Rxa7 etc. with a draw in view.'

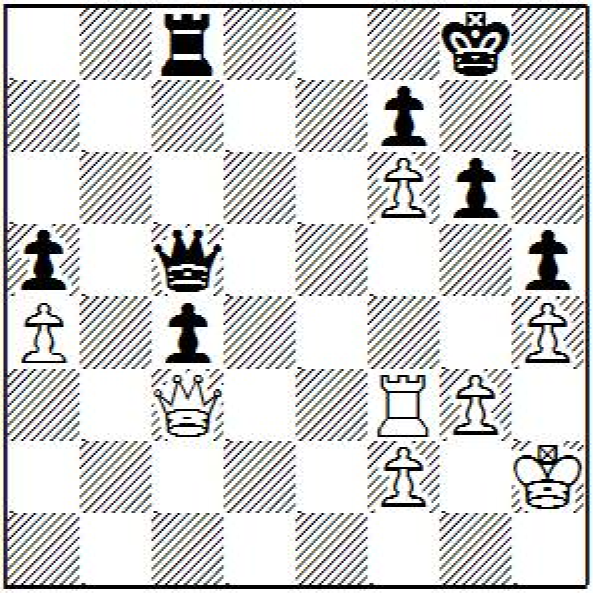
But I suggest precisely this move: 37 ... Bxa4! 38 Be4 (no better is 38 Re7 Bc6 39 Qxc4 Qxf6 40 Re3 Kg7) 38 ... Qd7! (38 ... Qc5!?) 39 Rf3 Bc6!

(instead of 39 ... Kh7?) with an obvious advantage to Black: 40 Qxc4? Bb7! 41 Qe2 Qh3! wins or 40 Qe3 Qe8 41 Rf4 a5 etc.

It is amazing that this was not noticed by Alekhine! Intuitively he decided not to take the pawn for the moment, but to fix it: let it hang there. And, incidentally, in the end it was precisely this ‘hanging’ pawn that played on Capablanca’s nerves and led to his defeat.

38 Bg2 Bxg2 39 Kxg2 Qd5+ 40 Kh2 Qf5 41 Rf3 Qc5

Here the game was adjourned. According to Alekhine, his earlier games with Janowski (Hastings 1925/26) and Colle (Scarborough 1926) had given him ‘the opportunity to study the struggle of queen and rook against the opponent’s queen and rook, and my knowledge in this field came in very useful in the match with Capablanca.’



42 Rf4!

On the resumption the world champion demonstrates the best defence. ‘After 42 Re3 Qb6 (*42 ... Qb4!? – G. K.*) White would not have any useful move at his disposal (43 Rf3 Qc6! etc.).’ (Alekhine)

42 ... Kh7

‘This was not necessary here: it was much more important to prevent White’s next move by 42 ... Qb6.’ (Alekhine) I agree. But after 42 ... Qb4? 43 Qe3! Qxa4 a strong response is 44 Rg4! (but not 44 Rxc4? Rxc4 45 Qh6

Rxh4+!, and 44 Rf5 Qe8!? 45 Re5 Qd8 46 Rxh5 Qxf6 47 Rxa5 c3 is also not so clear) 44 ... Qe8 45 Qh6 Qf8 46 Rxg6+ with a draw.

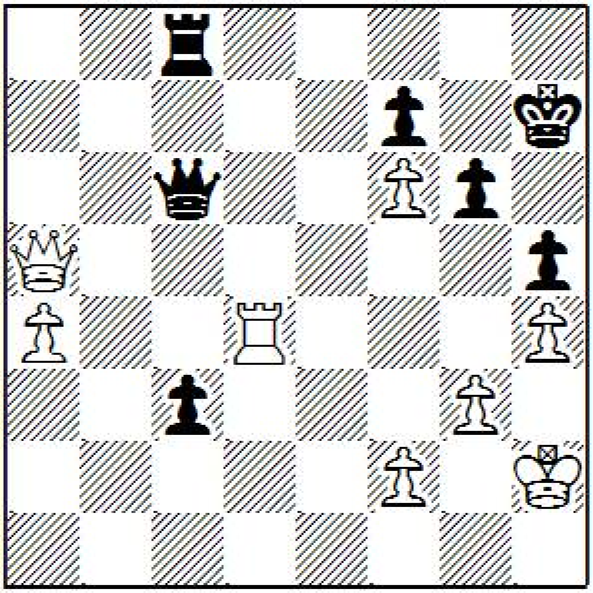
43 Rd4! Qc6?

‘A miscalculation, after which White could have saved the game. Correct was still 43 ... Qb6! and if 44 Rf4 then 44 ... Kg8 obtaining the same position as he could have had two moves earlier.’ (Alekhine) And indeed, after 45 Kg1 Qb4 46 Qe3 Qxa4 White faces difficult problems – 47 Rf5? does not work because of 47 ... Qd1+ 48 Kh2 gxf5, for example: 49 Qg5+ Kf8 50 Qg7+ Ke8 51 Qg8+ Kd7 52 Qxf7+ Kd6 53 Qe7+ Kc6 winning.

44 Qxa5

Launching a counterattack which is sufficient for a draw. ‘During his adjournment analysis Capablanca found an amazing defence. And therefore he is not afraid of the seemingly inevitable advance of Black’s passed pawn to the queening square.’ (Bronstein)

44 ... c3 (44 ... Qxf6 45 Rf4 Qe6 46 Qc3 leads to a draw)



45 Qa7! Kg8

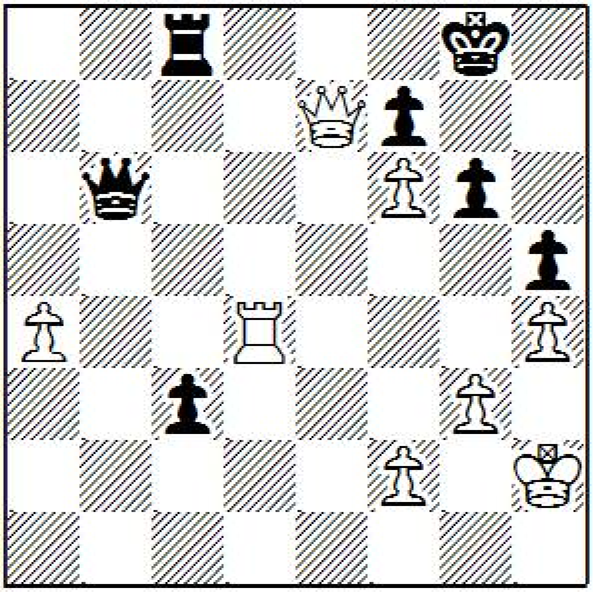
The only chance – and, amazingly, it worked! The challenger thought over this move for ... 1 hour 5 minutes!

In his earlier calculations Alekhine had been relying on 45 ... Rc7 46 Qb8 c2 (*46 ... Qxf6 47 Qxc7 Qxf2+ 48 Kh1 Qxd4 49 Qxf7+ – G. K.*) 47 Rd8

Qxf6, but had overlooked 48 Rh8+!! Qxh8 49 Qxc7 with a draw (49 ... Qb2 50 Qxf7+). In addition he gives the variations 45 ... Qc7 46 Qxc7 Rxc7 47 Rd1 and 45 ... Qxf6 (*? – G. K.*) 46 Rf4 Qxf4 47 gxf4 c2 48 Qxf7+ Kh6 49 f5! 'with a draw', but here White even wins: 49 ... gxf5 50 Qf6+ Kh7 51 Qxf5+ or 49 ... Rc6 50 Qe8.

46 Qe7 Qb6

After 46 ... c2? White would have forced a draw by 47 Rd8+ Rxd8 48 Qxd8+ Kh7 49 Qe7 Qe6 50 Qc7. But now one of the key moments of the game, and of the entire match, has been reached.



47 Qd7?

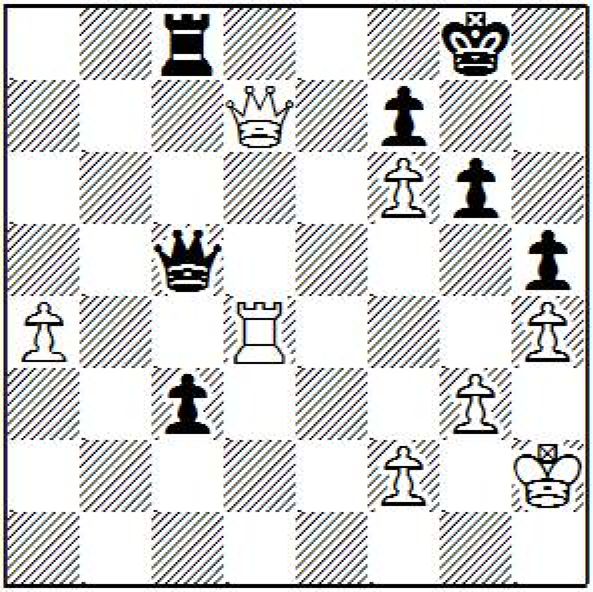
'Capablanca does not take full advantage of the opportunity given to him by my 43rd move. By playing 47 Rd7! he could have obtained a draw, as after 47 ... Qxf2+ (if 47 ... Rf8 then 48 a5 Qxa5 49 Ra7 Qd5 50 Rd7 and the white rook, because of the threat Qxf8+! would eternally persecute the queen) 48 Kh1! (48 Kh3 would lose, as in the main variation the black queen would reach the square e6 with check) 48 ... Qa2 (*48 ... Qf1+ 49 Kh2 Qc4 50 Rd8+ Rxd8 51 Qxd8+ Kh7 52 Qf8 – G. K.*) 49 Rd8+ Rxd8 50 Qxd8+ Kh7 51 Qf8 and there would not be anything better than perpetual, White's f6-pawn remaining invulnerable. A most unusual escape!' (Alekhine)

I would add that after 47 ... Rf8 White is also saved by both the cold-blooded 48 Kg2 Qc6+ 49 Kh2 c2 50 Rd8, and by Tarrasch's spectacular 48 Qe3!! Qxf6 (48 ... Qc6? 49 Rc7!) 49 Rc7.

However, although 47 Qd7 seriously complicates White's task, it does not yet lose the game. But it is here that the source of Capa's defeat is concealed: he did not want to allow the 'unclear' ... Qxf2. How horrible to have to calculate all these sharp variations! And suppose there might be a mate there?!

47 ... Qc5!

'I overlooked this simple reply.' (Capablanca) It unexpectedly transpires that the pawn has to be given up all the same, only in a far worse version.

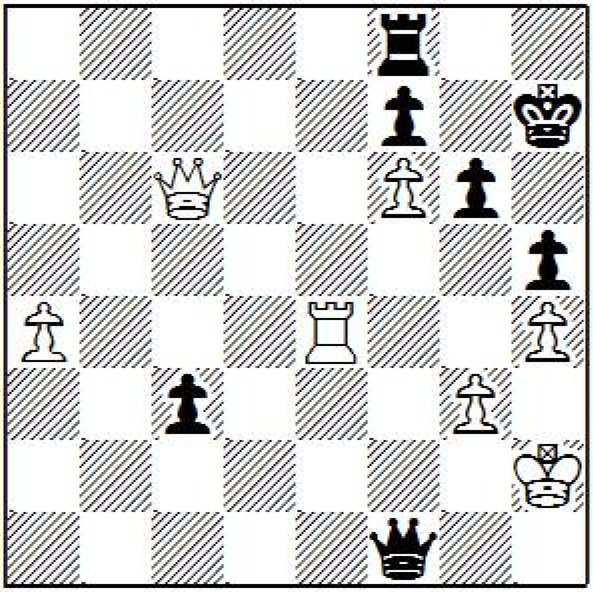


48 Re4! Qxf2+ (but not 48 ... c2? 49 Re8+ Rxe8 50 Qxe8+ Qf8 51 Qc6) **49 Kh3 Qf1+ 50 Kh2 Qf2+ 51 Kh3 Rf8 52 Qc6!** (again the only move) **52 ... Qf1+ 53 Kh2 Qf2+ 54 Kh3 Qf1+**

'Even better was 54 ... Qf3, threatening 55 ... Rd8; if White then tried to free his position with 55 Rc4, the attempt would be refuted by 55 ... Qf1+ 56 Kh2 Rd8.' (Alekhine) But 55 Kh2! leads to roughly the same situation as in the game.

55 Kh2 Kh7

Threatening ... Rd8 or ... Rb8 with a mating attack.



56 Qc4?

‘And again, the only move,’ writes Alekhine, ignoring 56 Re7! (but not 56 Qxc3? Qf2+ 57 Kh1 Rb8!), and after 56 ... Qf2+ 57 Kh3 c2 White has time to play 58 Rc7 Rd8 59 Qxc2 with a draw. A familiar picture: a rigorous move is required of Capa, but he makes a ‘natural’ one, after which, apparently, his position is already lost.

56 ... Qf2+ 57 Kh3 Qg1!

‘The decisive manoeuvre. As an alternative 57 ... c2 would be insufficient because of 58 Rf4! followed by Rf1.’ (Alekhine) Or 57 ... Qxf6? 58 Rf4 Qg7 59 Rf3 drawing.

58 Re2

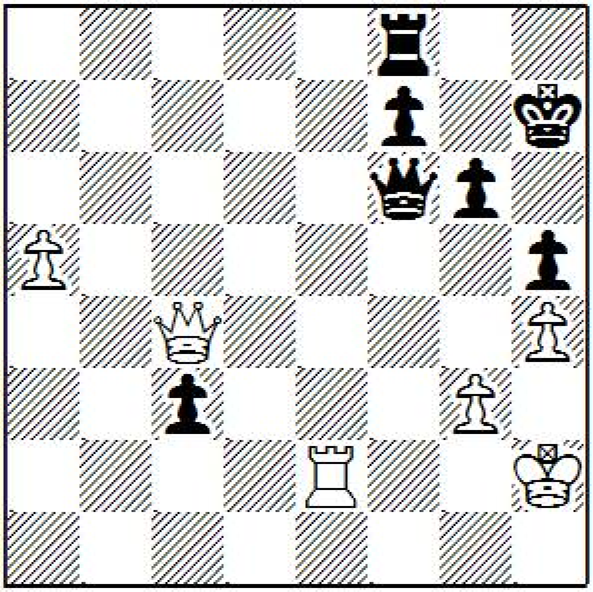
After 58 g4 Alekhine gave a genuinely very pretty win: 58 ... c2! 59 Qxc2 Re8!! Such tricks he didn’t overlook! For example: 60 Qc7 (60 Rxe8? hxg4 mate) 60 ... hxg4+ 61 Rxg4 Re3+ 62 Rg3 Qh1+ 63 Kg4 Re4+ and it’s all over.

58 ... Qf1+?

A second time-trouble and ... nerves, nerves! Black picks up the f6-pawn in unfavourable circumstances. ‘The right sequence of moves (which I actually intended by playing 57 ... Qg1!) was 58 ... Qh1+ 59 Rh2 Qf3!, after which White could not play 60 Rc2? because of 60 ... Qf5+; and he would be helpless against the threat of 60 ... Qxf6 etc. If 60 Qf4, then 60 ...

Qd1! etc.’ (Alekhine) (*followed by 61 Qc7 Qg4+ 62 Kg2 Qe2+ 63 Kh3 Qe6+ 64 Kg2 Rc8 – G. K.*). For example: 60 Re2 Qxf6 61 Kg2 Rb8! and wins.

59 Kh2 Qxf6 (59 ... Kh6 60 Qf4+) **60 a5?**

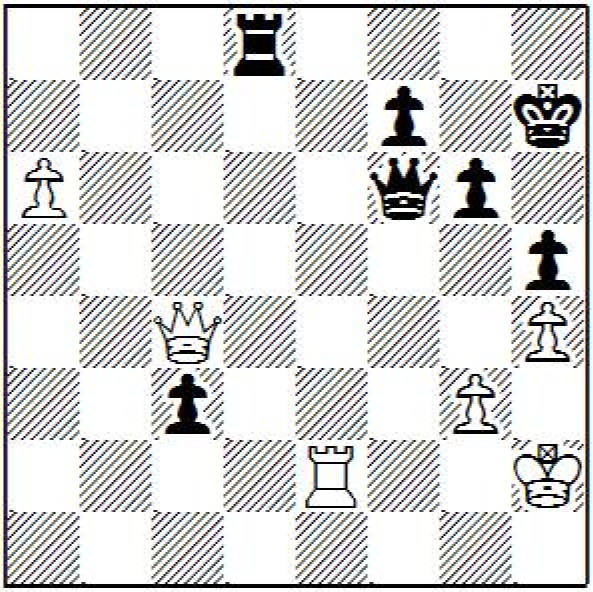


Also nerves! ‘Instead of securing the draw by 60 Rc2 Re8 61 Kg2 (threatening either 62 Rxc3 or 62 Rf2) Capablanca commits another error and should now lose instantly.’ (Alekhine) I think that in the time scramble the Cuban did not see 61 Kg2! (but not 61 Qxc3? Re2+!), since in the other variations with 60 Rc2 it is all very simple: 60 ... Rb8 61 Qxc3 Qf1 62 Qc4!, or 60 ... Rd8 61 Qxc3 Qf1 62 Rd2! Qe1 (62 ... Re8 63 Qd3) 63 Rc2.

60 ... Rd8?!

‘An immediate decision could be obtained by 60 ... Qf1! 61 Qe4 Rd8 or 61 ... Rb8. After the text move the win should become again quite a problem.’ (Alekhine) But, it would appear, not yet an insoluble one ...

61 a6?



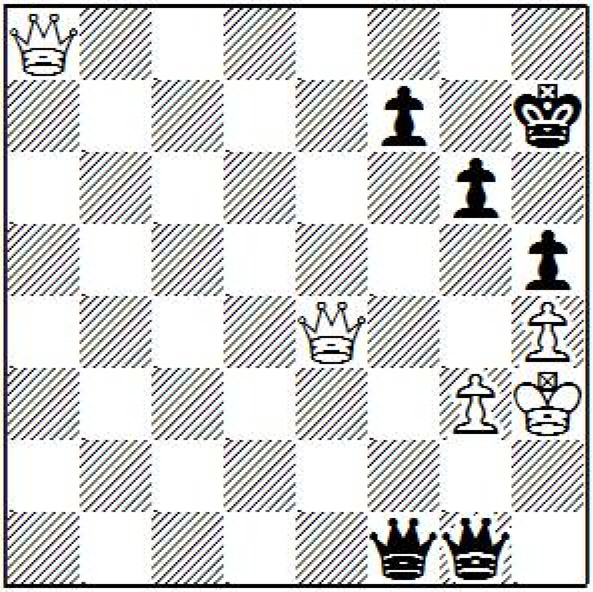
The utterly worn-out Capablanca makes a final mistake. He was clearly not accustomed to such fierce resistance: his opponent was all the time seeking paradoxical ideas! Capa was a champion of classical wrestling, whereas in this match Alekhine employed methods from unarmed self-defence or karate ...

‘After 61 Kg2 Black could only obtain a queen’s ending with three pawns against two, which, with the right defence, would normally be drawn. But even so, Black should gradually be able to win: 61 ... Kg7 62 a6 Rd1 63 Rf2 Rd2 64 Rxd2 (not 64 Qc5? Rxf2+ 65 Qxf2 Qc6+ 66 Qf3 Qxf3+ 67 Kxf3 c2 68 a7 c1Q 69 a8Q Qh1+) 64 ... cxd2 65 Qd5! Qb2 66 Kh3 Qc2 67 a7 Qf5+! (*voluntarily spoiling his pawns! – G. K.*) 68 Qxf5 gxf5 69 a8Q d1Q.’ (Alekhine) I agree: 70 Qg2 Qg4+ 71 Kh2 f4! 72 gxf4 Qxg2+ 73 Kxg2 Kg6 74 Kg3 Kf5 75 Kf3 f6 winning.

61 ... Qf1! (finally there comes a highly dramatic finish) **62 Qe4**

Or 62 a7 Rd2! 63 Rxd2 Qxc4 64 a8Q (64 Rc2 Qa4) 64 ... cxd2.

62 ... Rd2 63 Rxd2 cxd2 64 a7 d1Q 65 a8Q Qg1+ 66 Kh3 Qdf1+ 0-1



If 67 Qg2 Qh1 mate. A similar mate with two queens could have occurred with me against Karpov in the 22nd game of our return match in 1986, but Karpov did not take things that far, deviated and lost differently. But Capablanca was so shocked that he played on until mate! ‘Alekhine played the finish excellently. I am not able to win like that,’ he admitted after the game.

But Alekhine himself was rather self-critical: ‘In my opinion this game has been praised too much, the whole world over. It was doubtless very exciting both for the players – who were continuously short of time – and the public. But its final part represents a true comedy of errors in which my opponent several times missed a draw and I missed about the same number of winning opportunities. In short, but for its outstanding sporting importance (it became, in fact, the crucial point of the match) I would hardly have included in this collection of my best games.’

The scores became equal: 2-2. In the 12th game, also a rather complicated one, the nervous fatigue of the two players told: there were again rather a lot of mistakes. Capablanca seized the initiative, played with intensity and inventiveness, and had winning chances. But, apparently still in a ‘groggy’ state, he was again the last to make a mistake ...

Game 126

A.Alekhine-J.R.Capablanca

World Championship Match, Buenos Aires 1927, 12th game

Queen's Gambit D64

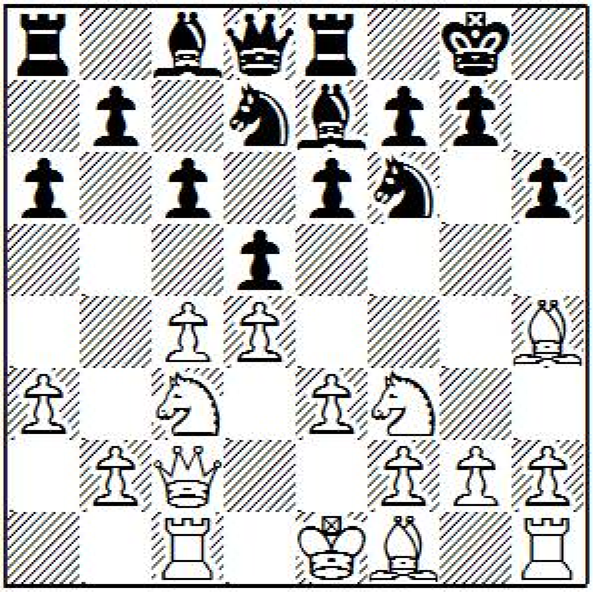
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Bg5 Nbd7 5 e3 Be7 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Rc1 c6 (7 ... a6) **8 Qc2 a6 9 a3**

The second game went 9 cxd5 (9 a4 – *Game No.121*) 9 ... Nxd5!? 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 11 Be2 (11 Bc4!? Alekhine-Vidmar, Hastings 1936/37) 11 ... Re8 12 0-0 Nxc3 13 Qxc3 e5 14 Rfd1 exd4 (14 ... e4!? 15 Nd2 Nf6 Rubinstein) 15 Nxd4 Nf6 16 Bf3 Bg4 17 Bxg4 Nxg4 18 Nf5 Qf6 19 Qxf6 Nxf6 ½-½, although after 20 Nd6 Re7 21 e4! White would have retained a slight advantage.

9 ... h6

The alternative is 9 ... Re8!? 10 Bd3 (10 cxd5 Nxd5!) 10 ... h6 11 Bf4 dxc4 12 Bxc4 b5 13 Be2 Bb7 14 0-0 c5 15 dxc5 Nxc5 16 Rfd1 Qb6 17 Be5 Rac8 18 Bd4 (the fourth game, with the bishop on a2, went 18 Qe2 Nce4 with equal chances) 18 ... Bxf3 19 Bxf3 Qb8 20 Bxc5 Rxc5 21 Qb1 Rec8 22 Ne4 ½-½ (26th game).

10 Bh4 Re8



11 Rd1?!

A strange move in the opening. The struggle for a tempo? But 'The arrival of the rook on the d-file is now too late.' (Alekhine) 11 Bd3 has also been played (*Game No.120*), but best of all is 11 cxd5! exd5 (11 ... Nxd5 12 Bg3!) 12 Bd3, for example: 12 ... Nh5 13 Bxe7 Rxe7 14 0-0 Nhf6 (14th game) 15 b4! followed by Na4-c5, a3-a4 etc**.**

11 ... b5!

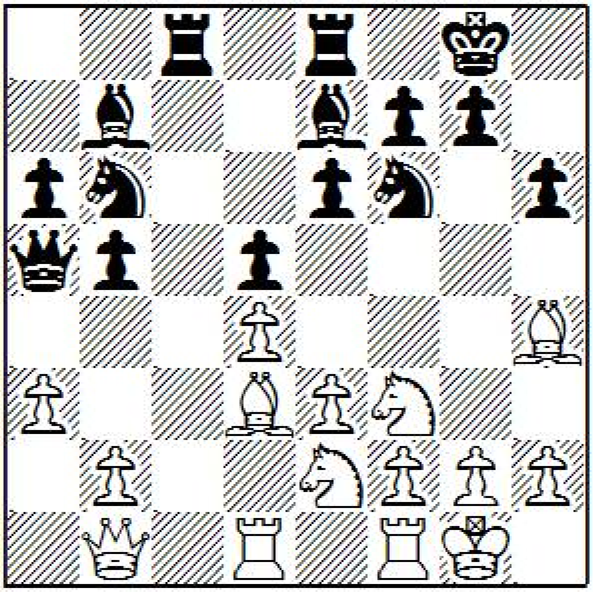
The routine 11 ... dxc4?! 12 Bxc4 b5 13 Bd3 c5 would have justified White's idea: 14 Bxf6! Nxf6 15 dxc5.

12 cxb5

'The constricting move 12 c5 would not be effective, for Black frees his game by the well known manoeuvre 12 ... e5 13 dxe5 Ng4 14 Bg3 Bxc5, a likely continuation being 15 h3 Ngxe5 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 Nxd5 cxd5 18 Qxc5 Bb7 (*18 ... Qa5+!? – G. K.*), with good play for his pieces.' (Alekhine)

12 ... cxb5 13 Bd3 Bb7 14 0-0 Rc8 15 Qb1 Qa5 (after 15 ... Bxa3?, apart from Alekhine's 16 bxa3 Rxc3 17 a4!, also possible is 16 Nxb5) **16 Ne2 Nb6?**

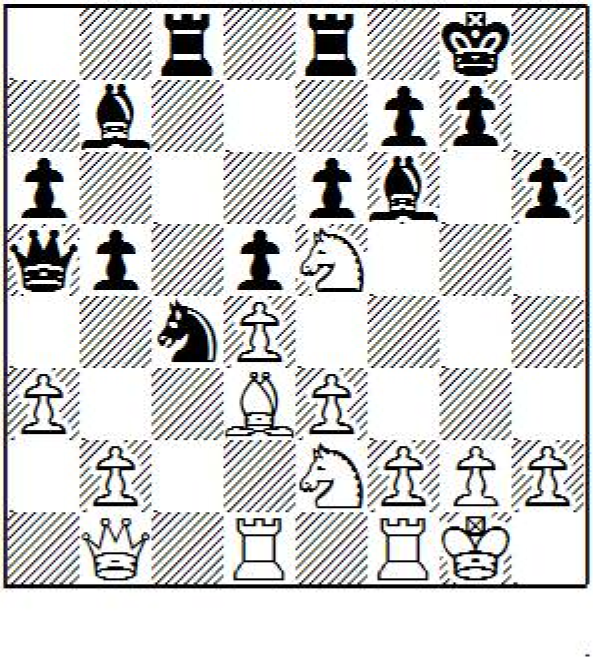
'A mistake. 16 ... b4 was a good continuation.' (Alekhine) After this the position would have simplified somewhat, but even so would have remained quite complicated – 17 Ne5, for example, was possible.



17 Ne5?

A very important moment! ‘With this White not only misses an excellent winning chance, but even incurs a disadvantage himself. Instead of this he could have exploited the temporary obstruction of the black queen as follows: 17 Bxf6! Bxf6 18 b4 Qa4 (18 ... Qxa3 leads to a rapid defeat after 19 Bh7+ Kh8 20 Rd3! Qa4 21 Nc3) 19 Rd2 Nc4 20 Ra2 Be7 21 Qa1 Nb6 22 Rb1 followed by Nc3 and White wins. It is clear from this variation that on move 17 Black would have had to recapture on f6 with the pawn rather than the bishop, but that would have left his king’s position in considerable danger, e.g. 17 ... gxf6 18 Nf4 Nc4 (18 ... f5 is also inadequate because of 19 g4! fxg4 20 Ne5 with a decisive attack, and 18 ... Nd7 will not do either, because of 19 e4 Qc7 20 Nh5 with a clear positional advantage for White) 19 Nxe6! fxe6 20 Bxc4 bxc4 (20 ... dxc4 is answered by 21 Qg6+ Kh8 22 Qxh6+ Kg8 23 Qg6+ Kh8 24 d5!, and 20 ... Rxc4 by 21 Qg6+ Kf8 22 Ne5! fxe5 23 f4, in each case with a winning advantage for White) 21 Qg6+ Kh8 22 Qxh6+ Kg8 23 Qg6+ Kh8 24 Nh4, threatening both 25 Qf7, and 25 f4 with Rf3, and a penetrating attack.’ (Alekhine)

17 ... Nc4! (occupying the strong-point; at the same time ... Nd2 is threatened) **18 Bxf6?!** (18 Nf3 is more solid) **18 ... Bxf6**

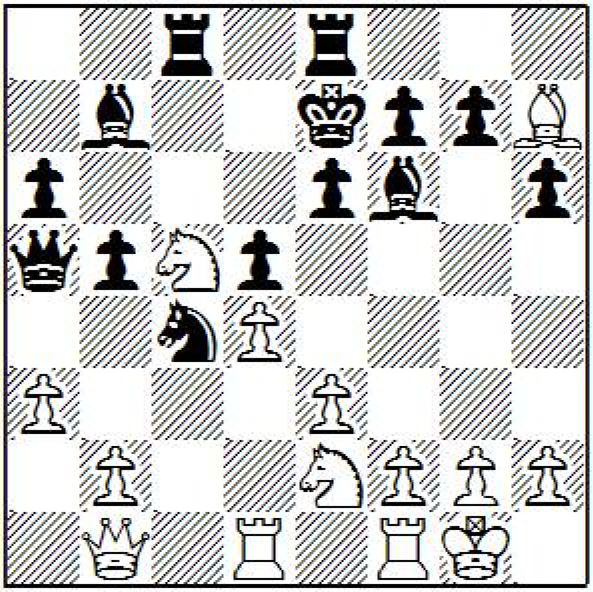


Of course, not 18 ... gxf6? in view of 19 Nxf7!? Kxf7 20 Bxc4, then Qh7+ and Nf4 (Alekhine), or 19 Bh7+ Kg7 20 Nxf7! f5 21 Nf4 Kxh7 22

Nxe6 Kg6 23 Nf4+ Kxf7 24 Qxf5+.

19 Bh7+ (19 Nf3!?) **19 ... Kf8 20 Nd7+ Ke7** (an unusual position, fighting play!) **21 Nc5**

But not 21 Nxf6? gxf6! with a double threat: ... Nd2 and ... f6-f5.



21 ... Qb6?

Here it is, the after-shock of the 11th game: the simple 21 ... Rxc5! would have given Black an almost decisive advantage, for example: 22 b4 (22 dxc5 Nxb2 23 Rc1 Nc4 etc.) 22 ... Nxa3 23 Qb3 (23 bxa5 Nxb1 24 dxc5 Na3 25 Bd3 Rc8 or 23 Qb2 Qc7! 24 bxc5 Qxc5 with powerful compensation for the exchange) 23 ... Qa4! 24 Qxa4 bxa4 25 bxc5 g6 26 Ra1 Nc4 27 Rxa4 a5 28 Nc3 Bc6 29 Ra2 Kf8 30 Na4 e5 and wins.

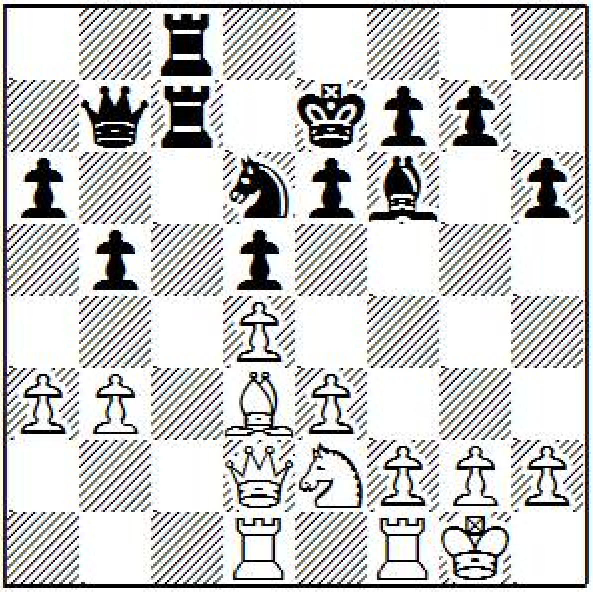
'After the text move Black does still retain some positional advantage, but he can no longer seriously expect to win the game.' (Alekhine)

22 Nxb7 (inaccurate is 22 Bd3?! Nxb2 23 Nxb7 Nxd3) **22 ... Qxb7 23 Bd3 Rc7?**

'With this Black loses the remainder of his advantage, for now he can no longer prevent his knight from being driven from its post. He had two ways of preventing b2-b3: by 23 ... Kf8 and ... Be7, or 23 ... Qb6 ... Qa5. In either case he would have maintained his knight outpost by the timely attack on the a3-pawn. This omission is particularly curious, because

Capablanca surely must have been aware that his one advantage consisted precisely in the superior position of his knight.’ (Alekhine)

24 Qa2 Rec8 25 b3 Nd6 26 Qd2



White already has a slight plus: he ‘is already giving his opponent something to think about, by threatening to infiltrate at a5 or b4 with his queen.’ (Alekhine) And in this slightly inferior position with its restless king, Capa slowly loses, from time to time making second-rate moves ‘on general grounds’.

26 ... Qb6 27 Rc1 Kd7 28 Rxc7+ Rxc7 29 Bb1!

Black would have liked to exchange all the rooks (after 29 Rc1 the game is level), but White is by no means obliged to fall in with his wishes. He is intending the manoeuvre Nf4-d3-c5.

29 ... Be7 30 Nf4 Kc8 31 Qe2!

White is not satisfied with 31 Nd3 Ne4 32 Qb2 Qc6 33 Rc1 Qd6 34 Rxc7+ with the exchange of rooks and a rapid draw. Had the black king been at g8, rather than c8, this is how it would all have ended: White would not have even a hint of the attack that brings him victory in the game.

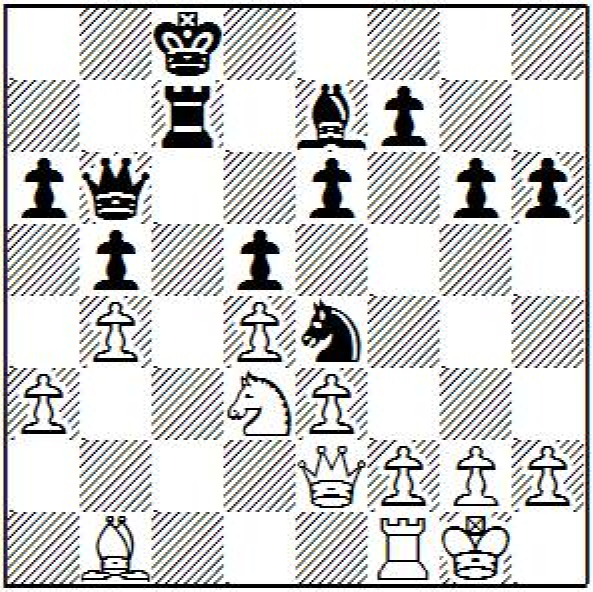
31 ... g6

If 31 ... Rc3 Alekhine had in mind 32 Qg4! Kd8 (32 ... Rxb3? 33 Nxd5) 33 Qxg7, and also if 31 ... Qa5!? – 32 Qg4! with ‘some very sharp lines in which White would have kept the upper hand, e.g. 32 ... Kb7 (*32 ...*

Bf8!? – G. K.) 33 Qxg7 Qxa3 34 Qxh6 Rc1 35 Bd3 Rxf1+ (*35 ... Rc7!? – G. K.*) 36 Bxf1 Qxb3 37 h4 a5 (*? – G. K.*) 38 Nxe6! fxe6 39 Qxe6 Nc8 40 h5.' (Alekhine) I agree: 40 ... Kc7 41 h6 Qb1 42 Qf7 wins. But after 37 ... Qc2! 38 Nd3 (38 Nxe6? Ne4!) 38 ... a5 39 Nc5+ Ka7 the evaluation of the position is by no means clear-cut.

32 Nd3 Ne4?! 33 b4

Alekhine's consistent and energetic play makes this game very interesting. White has subtly increased his advantage, by preparing to occupy c5. And at this pre-time-trouble moment, Black makes two suicidal errors, one after another.



33 ... Rc3?

Pseudo-activity! However, Black's position was already difficult: to Capablanca's recommendation of 33 ... Nd6 34 Nc5 Nc4 Alekhine responded with the sharp 35 e4! Bxc5 (35 ... Nxa3 36 exd5 exd5 37 Qf3 or 35 ... dxe4 36 a4!) 36 dxc5 Qc6 37 exd5 exd5 38 a4! bxa4 39 Ba2 Qb5 40 Rd1 Rd7 41 h4 'and White has very good attacking chances'.

34 Qb2! (34 Nc5 Nxc5 35 dxc5 Qc7 36 Qf3 f5 is pointless) **34 ... Qc7?**

'Only this is the real error, which quickly leads to defeat. Black could still have retreated the rook to c7, admittedly with a markedly worse game, e.g. 34 ... Rc7 35 Nc5 Nd6 (both 35 ... Nxc5 and 35 ... Bxc5 would lose a pawn after 36 dxc5 and Qh8+) 36 a4, and White has a strong attack.' (Alekhine)

35 Nc5 (with the threat of ... Bxe4) **35 ... Bxc5** (or 35 ... Rc4 36 Bd3 Nxc5 37 dxc5 Rg4 38 h3 winning) **36 dxc5 Qe5 37 f4!**

'This move, which deprives the black queen of the possibility of occupying a protected square on the e5-h8 diagonal, had been overlooked by Capablanca. The pin on the rook at c3, which Black was just about to resolve to his own advantage by ... Nf6, threatening ... Rxe3, now becomes fatal to him.' (Alekhine)

37 ... Qg7 (no better was 37 ... Qf6 38 Bxe4 dxe4 39 Rf2) **38 Bxe4 dxe4 39 Kf2?!**

Time-trouble! Simpler was 39 Rf2 g5 40 Rc2 and wins.

39 ... Qf6 40 g3 g5 41 Rc1 1-0

After 41 ... gxf4 42 Rxc3 fxg3+ 43 Kg1! the king avoids perpetual check: 43 ... gxh2+ 44 Kxh2 Qh4+ 45 Kg2 Qg4+ 46 Kf1! Qf3+ 47 Ke1 Qh1+ 48 Kd2 etc.

The score became 3-2 in favour of the challenger. In Buenos Aires something unbelievable was happening! At the time the story went round the city, that a dumb person, a fervent Capablanca supporter, on hearing about the result of the 12th game, exclaimed: 'It's not possible!' – and in his grief he again lost the power of speech ...

It was indeed an unprecedented occurrence: Capablanca had lost two games in a row! In a complicated, rather irrational struggle Alekhine had proved stronger. This had to be digested, and the rather shaken champion began making draws. The challenger also did not object to a temporary calm: sooner or later the opponent would have to open up ...

Of special note in this drawing series are the 17th game, where Alekhine masterfully saved a difficult endgame, and the exciting 20th – the herald of further shocks.

Game 127

A.Alekhine-J.R.Capablanca

World Championship Match, Buenos Aires 1927, 20th game

Queen's Gambit D67

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e3 0-0 6 Nf3 Nbd7 7 Rc1 c6 (7 ... a6) **8 Bd3** (avoiding the struggle for a tempo by 8 Qc2) **8 ... dxc4**

Learning from bitter experience, the champion aims for simplification, choosing the relieving 'Capablanca Variation'. From the practical viewpoint this was the correct decision: all eight of the match duels on this theme ended in draws, although White held some initiative.

9 Bxc4 Nd5 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 11 Ne4 N5f6

More accurate than 11 ... Qb4+ 12 Qd2 Qxd2+ 13 Kxd2 Rd8 14 Rhd1 N5f6 in view of 15 Nxf6+ Nxf6 16 Bb3! with a slight advantage for White (sixth game).

12 Ng3 Qb4+ 13 Qd2 Qxd2+ 14 Kxd2 Rd8

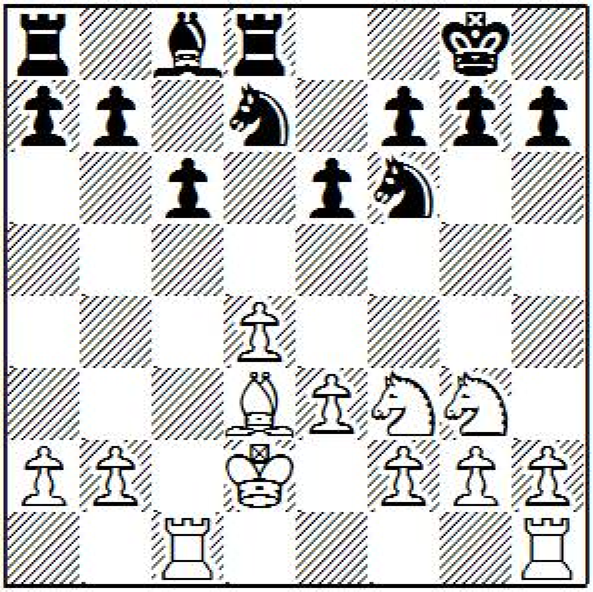
A further refinement: the 16th game went 14 ... b6 15 e4 Rd8 16 e5 Ne8 17 Ke3 Bb7 18 Rhd1 c5?! (18 ... Kf8!) 19 d5 (in the press it was written that 'Alekhine took so long thinking over this move, that Capablanca had time to take a nap'; 19 Ne4!? is also interesting) 19 ... exd5 20 Bxd5 Bxd5 21 Rxd5 Nc7 22 Rd2 Nf8 23 Rcd1 Rxd2 24 Rxd2 ½-½. White has clearly the better endgame, and Alekhine had to justify such an early agreement to a draw:

'We were playing in the Jockey Club, not the usual venue, and it was so noisy that we were forced to adjourn at move 24, i.e. even before the time control, in order to allow time for things to calm down. Later on, however, I was no longer in the mood for deep thought, and the game was agreed drawn without further ado. Incidentally, the above lines may serve to show that the report that my opponent "fell asleep" during this game was nothing more than the invention of some witty newspaper man.'

As it later transpired, Black equalises more simply by 14 ... c5! 15 Bb5 (15 Ke2 cxd4 16 Nxd4 Ne5; 15 dxc5 Nxc5 16 Ke2 Bd7 17 Ne5 Rfd8) 15 ... cxd4 16 Nxd4 Nb6 17 f4 Rd8 (Alekhine-Stahlberg, Buenos Aires Olympiad 1939).

15 Bd3

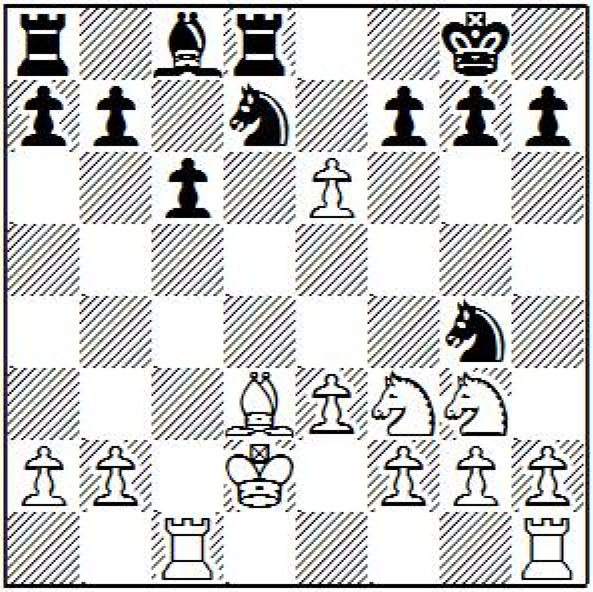
Preventing the development of the black bishop by ... b7-b6 and ... Bb7. The 18th game went 15 Ke2 b6 16 Rhd1 Bb7 17 Rd2 (or 17 Rc2 c5) 17 ... Kf8 18 Rcd1 Ke7 19 e4 h6! 20 h3 g6 21 Rd3 c5 with a level game. And in the 22nd, 24th, 28th and 30th games the discussion revolved around 15 Rhd1! b6 16 e4 Bb7 17 e5 Ne8 18 Ke3 Kf8! etc.



After some thought, Capablanca realised that he had only one way to free himself:

15 ... e5! (otherwise Black will simply suffocate) **16 dxe5** (but not 16 Nxe5? Nxe5 17 dxe5 Ng4 and Black is on top) **16 ... Ng4 17 e6!**

Adding fuel to the fire. ‘If White is happy to settle for immediate equality, he can continue 17 Ke2 Ndxe5 18 Nxe5 Nxe5 19 Bf5!’ (Alekhine)

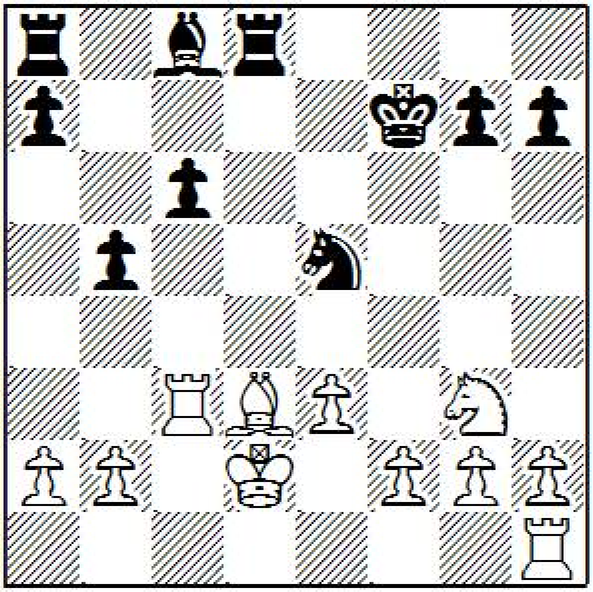


17 ... Nde5!

Interesting complications! ‘17 ... fxe6 would be answered not by 18 Ke2, since then Black would obtain a very comfortable game by 18 ... Nde5 19 Nxe5 Nxe5 20 Rhd1 b6, but by 18 Ke1!, since in that case 18 ... Nde5 fails as follows: 19 Nxe5 Nxe5 20 Be4 b6 21 f4 Nd3+ 22 Bxd3 Rxd3 23 Rxc6 Bb7 (not 23 ... Rxe3+ because of 24 Kd2 and White wins; *but 23 ... e5! 24 f5 Ba6 25 Rc7 Rxe3+ 26 Kf2 Rd3 27 Re1 etc. is more tenacious – G. K.*) 24 Rc7 Bxg2 25 Rg1 with a winning position for White. Thus, since after 18 Ke1! Black would have to avoid the sharp lines, he would remain at something of a disadvantage because of his weakened pawn formation.’ (Alekhine)

18 Nxe5 Nxe5 19 exf7+ Kxf7 20 Rc3 b5!

An excellent tactical resource! ‘Because of the strong threat of 21 ... b5-b4 followed by 22 ... Ba6, White is forced to challenge the hostile knight immediately.’ (Alekhine)



21 f4!

All ‘normal’ moves lose – 21 b4? a5! or 21 Ne4? b4 22 Rb3 Ba6 23 Nc5 Nxd3 24 Nxd3 c5, and so Alekhine sacrifices the exchange! I think that the subsequent turn of events must have been another psychological blow to Capablanca. Again he was inferior to his opponent in evaluating the dynamic resources of the position: he was hoping that the rook would outweigh the minor piece, and he almost lost ... In fact, White has equal chances at the very least.

21 ... b4 22 fxe5!

‘22 Rb3 would favour Black because of 22 ... Nc4+ 23 Kc2 (23 Ke2 Bg4+ and ... Na5) 23 ... Nxe3+ 24 Kc1 Be6 25 Bg6+ hxg6 26 Rxe3 Bxa2 27 b3 a5.’ (Alekhine)

22 ... bxc3+ 23 Kxc3 (with the threat of Ne4-d6) **23 ... Ke6**

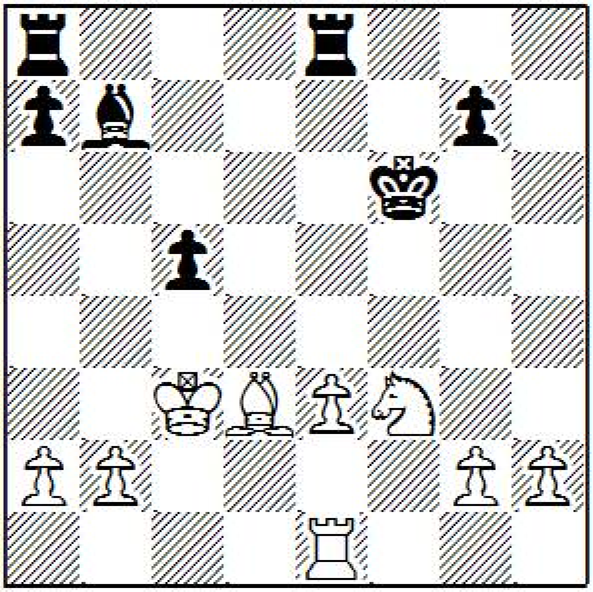
‘23 ... Re8 would be weaker because of 24 Bc4+ Kg6 (24 ... Be6 25 Ne4!) 25 Kd4 c5+ 26 Kxc5 Rxe5+ 27 Kd4 followed by e3-e4 and the possibility of Bd5, with a good game for White.’ (Alekhine)

24 Ne2! (but not 24 Bxh7 Kxe5 and ... Be6 with equal chances) **24 ... Kxe5 25 Nd4!?**

Playing for domination! ‘If 25 Bxh7 at once, Black would not play 25 ... Bf5 because of 26 Bxf5 Kxf5 27 Rf1+! with a good game for White, since 27 ... Ke4 would be refuted by 28 Ng3+! Kxe3? 29 Rf3 mate, but 25 ... Ba6!, which would secure him the initiative.’ (Alekhine) True, after 26 Nf4 Rd6 27 h4 White is not in danger of losing, but ... neither is Black!

25 ... Bb7 26 Bxh7 c5 27 Nf3+ Kf6 28 Bd3 (inferior is 28 Rf1?! Ba6 29 Rf2 g6) **28 ... Re8 29 Re1**

Here too 29 Rf1? is weak because of 29 ... Rxe3 30 Nd4+ Ke5! 31 Rf5+ Kd6.



29 ... Bxf3?!

Objectively simpler was 29 ... Be4! (but not 29 ... Re7?! 30 e4) 30 Bxe4 Rxe4 31 Nd2 Rg4 32 Re2 followed by e3-e4 and a probable draw. But Capa had not yet resigned himself to the fact that the position was approximately equal. I think that this position with unbalanced material was not to his liking: it turns out that it is not Black, but White who has a small plus!

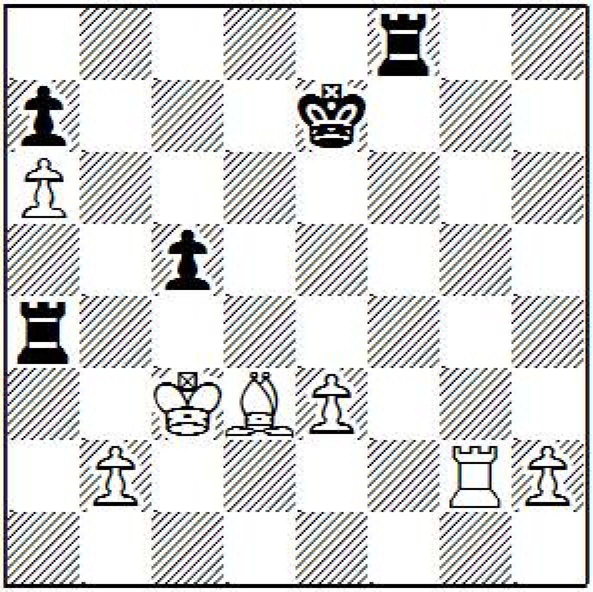
30 gxf3 Rh8 31 Re2 Rh4 32 Be4 Rd8!

According to Alekhine, 32 ... Rah8?! is inaccurate in view of 33 Rd2 (threatening Rd6+ and Ra6) 34 ... Ke7 34 Rg2 Kf7 35 Rg5! Rc8 36 h3 Rc7 37 Rg3, then b2-b3, a2-a4, Kc4 and possibly f3-f4 and Bg2 with the initiative.

33 a4

‘White could also safely make an attempt to win with 33 Kc4, but after 33 ... Rdh8 34 Rd2 Rxh2 35 Rd6+ Ke7 36 Ra6 Rxb2 37 Rxa7+ Kd6 a draw would once again be the likely outcome.’ (Alekhine)

33 ... g5 34 a5 (34 b3!? Alekhine) **34 ... g4! 35 fxg4** (35 f4 Rh3 36 Bc6 Rdh8 37 Bd7 is unclear) **35 ... Rxg4 36 Bd3 Ra4 37 Rf2+ Ke7 38 a6 Rf8** (more rigorous is 38 ... Ra1 39 Rg2 c4! 40 Bxc4 Rc8 41 Kb4 Rb8+! or 41 b3 Rxa6 with a draw) **39 Rg2**



39 ... c4?

A nervy, impulsive thrust – typical of a time scramble. Of course, 39 ... Rf7 was correct.

40 Bxc4?

Amnesty! With his last move before the time control the challenger misses an excellent winning chance – 40 Rg7+!, for example: 40 ... Rf7 41 Rxf7+ Kxf7 42 Bxc4+ and with accurate play White should win, or 40 ... Kf6 41 Rg6+ Kf7 42 Rg4!, picking up the c4-pawn.

40 ... Rc8 41 b3 Rxa6 42 e4 Ra1! 43 Kd4

Or 43 e5 Rc1+ 44 Kb4 (44 Kd4 Rd1+; 44 Kb2 R1xc4 45 bxc4 Rxc4 46 Kb3 Rh4) 44 ... a5+ 45 Kxa5 R1xc4! drawing

43 ... Rh8 ½-½

‘It is impossible for White to concentrate his forces to any decisive effect.’ (Alekhine)

The draws in the 17th and 20th games had a dispiriting effect on Capablanca: he did not see how he could defeat Alekhine. In 1921 the same thing happened with Lasker, who did not know how to beat Capablanca. But Lasker, after all, was 52 years old and playing in a foreign land, whereas the 39-year-old Capa was at the height of his powers and was practically playing at home, in his native continent. Gradually be began to overcome the crisis, and therefore the match turned out to be far more interesting.

However, before this came the 21st game, which came as a shock to both the champion, and the entire chess world: no one had yet defeated Capablanca in *such* a way!

Game 128

J.R.Capablanca-A.Alekhine

World Championship Match, Buenos Aires 1927, 21st game

Queen’s Gambit D63

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Nbd7 5 e3 Be7 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Rc1 a6!?

It is curious that in the match Alekhine only played this (eight times), while Capa played only 7 ... c6 (13 times), and both mini-matches, both with White and with Black, were won by the challenger with a score of '+1', all the other games being drawn.

8 a3?!

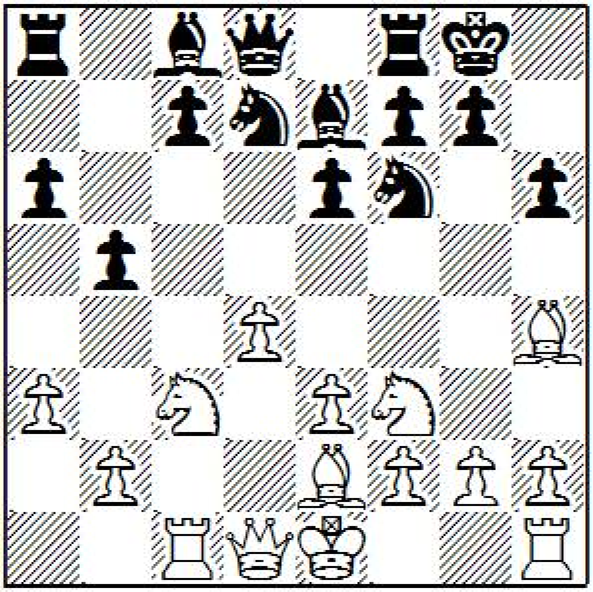
'This tame rejoinder will be convincingly refuted (as a winning attempt, of course) in the present game,' writes Alekhine, recommending 8 cxd5, as in the later odd-numbered games (*Game No.105*).

The plan with 8 c5!? was not highly rated at that time in view of 8 ... c6 9 b4 a5 10 a3 axb4 11 axb4 b6 12 Bf4 (12 Bd3 bxc5 13 bxc5 e5!) 12 ... bxc5 13 bxc5 Ra3! equalising (Alekhine-Henneberger, Basel simultaneous 1925). However, current theory gives preference to 9 Bd3 b6 10 cxb6! with a slight advantage (Portisch-Petrosian, Palma de Mallorca 10th matchgame 1974).

8 ... h6! 9 Bh4 dxc4! 10 Bxc4 b5!

'More natural and better than 10 ... c5 which, however, in the 13th, 15th, 17th and 19th games proved sufficient for maintaining the balance of the position.' (Alekhine) An improvement at the fifth attempt! Such was the level of theoretical duels at that time ...

11 Be2 (or 11 Ba2 Bb7 12 0-0 c5 equalising)



11 ... Bb7?

No one has mentioned that 11 ... c5! was more accurate. Apparently Alekhine was sure that all the same Capa would not do anything before castling.

12 0-0?

‘In the event of 12 b4 Black would have obtained the initiative by 12 ... a5! 13 Qb3 axb4 14 axb4 g5 15 Bg3 Nd5 etc.’ (Alekhine) Excuse me, but after 16 0-0 Black’s position is bad. Of course, White should have played for a bind – 12 b4!

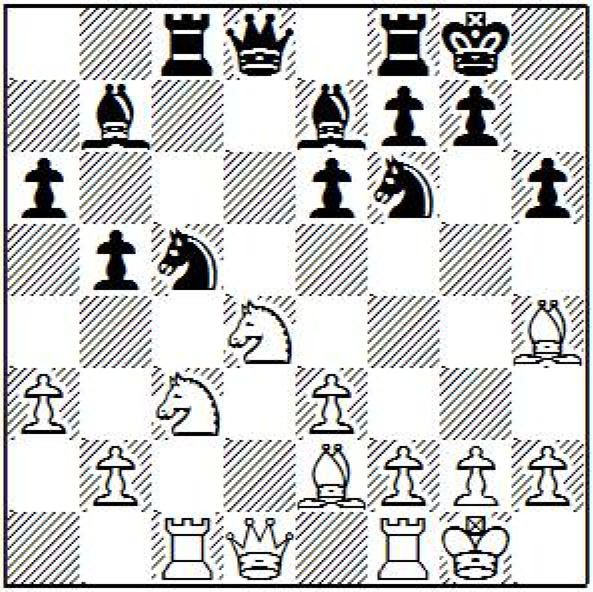
12 ... c5 13 dxc5 Nxc5 14 Nd4

This move does not yet spoil anything, but ... ‘As White has not an atom of advantage the logical course for him was to simplify matters by means of 14 Qxd8 Rfxd8 15 Rfd1.’ (Alekhine) With the approximate continuation 15 ... Nb3 16 Rc2 Rac8 17 Rxd8+ Bxd8 18 Bd1 Bc7 19 Bg3 and a level game.

Alekhine considered 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Nxb5 to be ‘entirely wrong’ because of 15 ... Qxd1 16 Rfxd1 Nb3 17 Rc7 Bxf3 18 Bxf3 axb5 19 Bxa8 Rxa8 ‘with advantage to Black’. However, in my view, after 20 Rb7 Ra5 (20 ... Bxb2 21 Rxb5 Rxa3 22 Rb1 is equal) 21 g3 Kh7 22 Rxf7 Kg6 23 Rb7 Bxb2 24 Rb1 Nc5 25 Rb6 Na4 26 Rxe6+ Kf7 27 Rc6 Bxa3 this advantage is only slight.

14 ... Rc8

Parrying once and for all the threat of Nxb5.



15 b4?!

An unforced weakening of the c4-square. It would appear that Capa had not in fact decided whether he should play for a win or a draw, and vacillation in a complicated position normally has unfortunate results ... According to Alekhine, 15 Bf3 Qb6 16 Qe2 was simpler, with equal chances.

15 ... Ncd7!

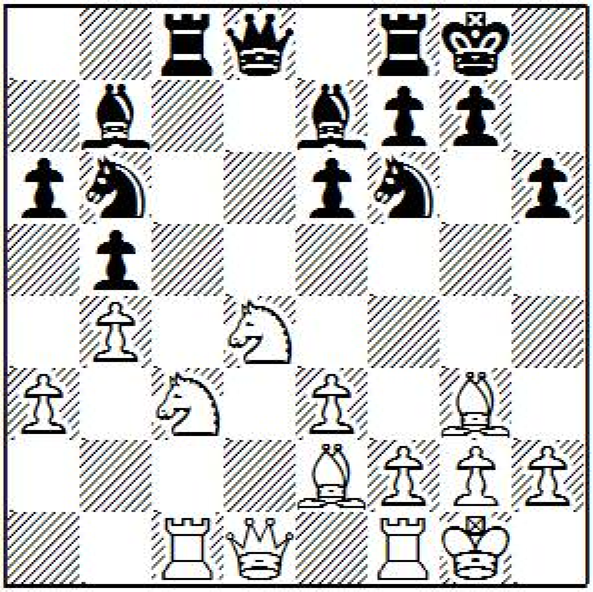
An unusual decision! Once again Capablanca ‘did not guess’: I think that he was expecting 15 ... Nce4.

16 Bg3

‘In the event of 16 Bf3 I intended to play 16 ... Qb6 17 Ne4 Rxc1 18 Qxc1 Rc8, after which the white queen would have had no good square at her disposal, for instance: 19 Qb1? (or 19 Qd2?) 19 ... Nxe4 etc., 19 Qb2 g5 20 Nxf6+ Bxf6, 19 Qd1(e1) g5 – also to Black’s advantage.’ (Alekhine) Advantage is not the word! After 17 Ne4? (17 Bg3 Rfd8 18 Qe2 really is better) the computer instantly finds an elementary win: 17 ... Rxc1 18 Qxc1 Bxe4! 19 Bxe4 g5 20 Nc6 (20 Bg3 Nxe4) 20 ... Bd6.

‘By playing 16 Nb3, to answer 16 ... Nb6 with 17 Na5 (*17 ... Ba8 18 Bg3 etc. – G. K.*), Capablanca would have maintained every chance in the forthcoming struggle. But it was very hard for him to move his knight from its excellent central square somewhere sideways, to the edge of the board.’ (Kotov) Yes, the knight at a5 is somewhat cut off, but on the other hand it holds the c4-square! However, it is not yet curtains ...

16 ... Nb6



17 Qb3?! (here too 17 Nb3 had its point) **17 ... Nfd5!**

A surprise! It would appear that Capa had considered only the crude 17 ... Nc4? 18 Rfd1 Qb6 19 a4! But Alekhine hinders a3-a4 and creates the positional threat of 18 … Nxc3 19 Rxc3 Bd5 20 Qb2 Rxc3 21 Qxc3 Qa8 and ... Rc8!

18 Bf3

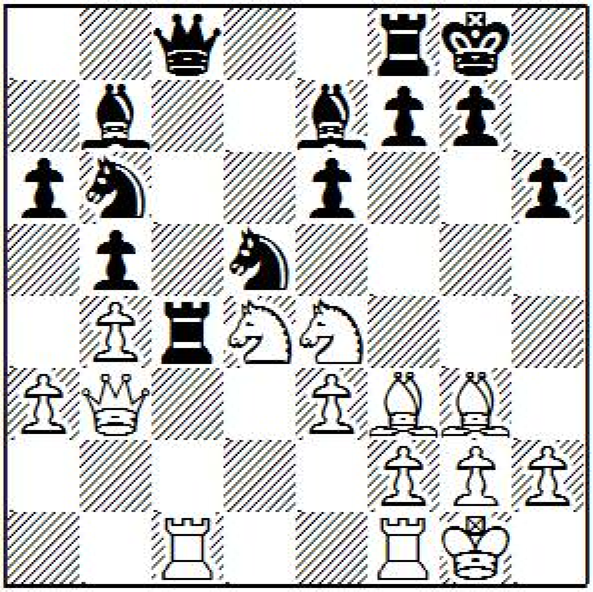
‘A rather makeshift defence.’ (Alekhine) White also has definite problems after 18 Ne4!? – the weakening of a number of squares is felt, especially c4, for example: 18 ... Na4 19 Rxc8 Qxc8 20 Nd6 Bxd6 21 Bxd6 Re8 22 Be5 Ndc3 23 Bd3 f6 24 Bg3 Be4 etc.

18 ... Rc4!

Consistent play and ... again a surprise for Capablanca: a non-routine move – not the knight, but the rook! Generally speaking, I think that in this match Capa simply did not guess some of his opponent’s moves ...

19 Ne4 (it is hard to decide on the return of the bishop – 19 Be2, especially since after 19 ... Rxc3 20 Rxc3 Nxc3 21 Qxc3 Qd7 22 Rd1 Rc8 23 Qd3 Bd5 White stands rather worse) **19 ... Qc8**

A critical moment.



20 Rxc4?

‘The decisive positional error. White’s correct move was 20 Qb1!, threatening both Nd6 or Bd6; if in that case 20 ... Rd8, then 21 Nd2! Rxc1 22 Rxc1 Qa8 23 Bc7 and White would succeed in exchanging some further material without compromising his position.’ (Alekhine) But I would add 23 N4b3 with equal chances. Therefore more promising is 20 ... Rxc1!? 21 Rxc1 Nc4 22 Qa2 Rd8 with some advantage to Black, whereas after the move in the game it becomes even greater.

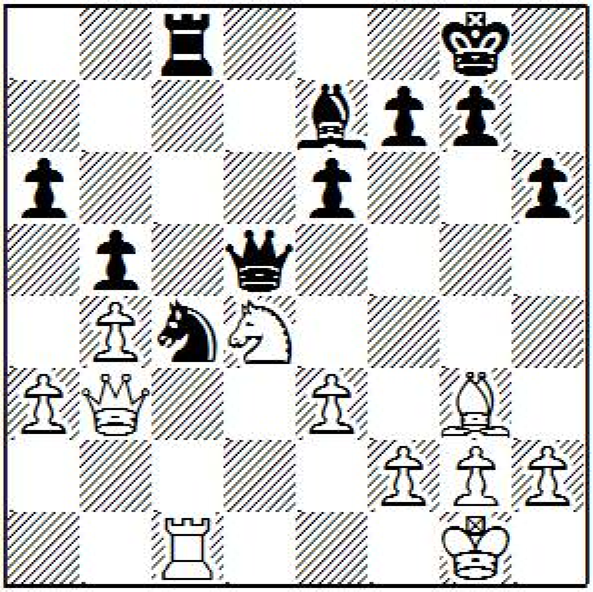
Here Alekhine is one hundred per cent right: ‘Capablanca lost this game only because he did not realise in time the dangers of his position.’

20 ... Nxc4 21 Rc1 Qa8! (the threats of 22 ... Ndxe3 and 22 ... Nxb4 force White to retreat his knight from e4) **22 Nc3**

If 22 Nc5, then 22 ... Bxc5 23 bxc5 Rc8 24 Be2 Rxc5 25 Bxc4 Qc8 winning a pawn.

22 ... Rc8 (with the threat of ... Nd2) **23 Nxd5 Bxd5 24 Bxd5 Qxd5**

It is significant that White’s position is already, apparently, strategically lost, although Capa would not appear to have made any serious mistakes. It’s really quite something to achieve this by the 25th move in the Queen’s Gambit!



25 a4?!

‘The wish to reduce the pawn material on the queenside is natural, but White’s position still remains compromised, inasmuch as his b-pawn will become a welcome object of attack in the endgame.’ (Alekhine)

Extremely tired by the preceding struggle, Capa becomes nervous and does not offer the maximum resistance. Lasker suggested 25 f3 Bf6 26 Bf2, but after 26 ... Rd8 (26 ... Bxd4!?) 27 a4 (27 e4 Qg5! 28 Rd1 Bxd4 29 Bxd4 Nd2 30 Qc3 Rxd4 wins) 27 ... Nxe3! 28 Qxd5 Nxd5 29 axb5 Nf4 30 Kf1 Nd3 31 Nc6 Nxc1 32 Nxd8 axb5 White is in trouble. Therefore 25 h3 was essential, and only after 25 ... Bf6 26 Nf3 Rd8 – 27 a4, although here too White’s position is unenviable.

25 ... Bf6! 26 Nf3

‘Of course, not 26 Rd1 bxa4 27 Qxa4? Nb2 28 Qxa6 Ra8 and wins.’ (Alekhine) And White does not go in for 26 axb5 Bxd4 27 exd4 axb5, realising that he will most probably be unable to hold his b4-pawn.

26 ... Bb2!

The beginning of the end: before playing the advance ... e6-e5-e4, Black activates his bishop.

27 Re1

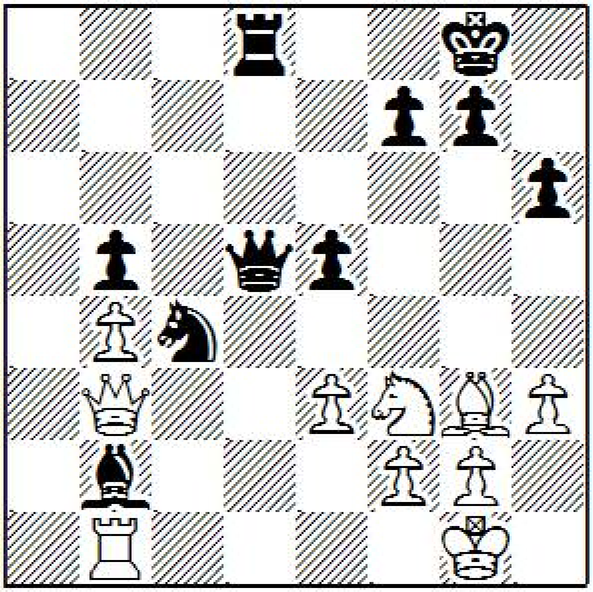
‘The tactical justification of this bishop move is based upon the following variations: 27 Rd1 bxa4! (more convincing than 27 ... Nxe3 28

Rxd5 Rc1+ 29 Rd1 Rxd1+ 30 Qxd1 Nxd1 31 axb5 axb5 32 Bd6 when White could still put up some resistance) 28 Qxa4 Nb6! 29 Rxd5 Nxa4 30 Rd1 Nc3 31 Re1 Rc4 32 Bd6 Ne4 33 Be7 f6 34 Rb1 Kf7 35 Kf1 Bc3 with an easily won ending, or 27 Rb1 Na3! 28 Qxb2 Nxb1 29 Qxb1 Qb3! 30 Qf1 bxa4 31 h3 a3, and the a-pawn marches forward to victory.' (Alekhine) White also fails to save the game by 30 Qa1 (30 Qe1? Qa3! 31 Qd2 Qc1+) 30 ... Qxa4! 31 Qe1 Qa3 32 Qd2 Rc1+ 33 Ne1 Qb2! 34 Qd8+ Kh7 35 Qd3+ f5 36 f3 Qxb4.

Very impressive variations on favourite Alekhine themes: diversion, the weakness of the back rank, and so on.

27 ... Rd8 28 axb5 axb5 29 h3 (alas, too late) **29 ... e5! 30 Rb1**

Finding himself practically in zugzwang, Capablanca allows an original tactical stroke by his opponent. It is hard to recommend the move 30 e4 in view of 30 ... Qd3 (and if necessary ... f7-f6) with the inevitable fall of the b4-pawn.



30 ... e4! 31 Nd4?!

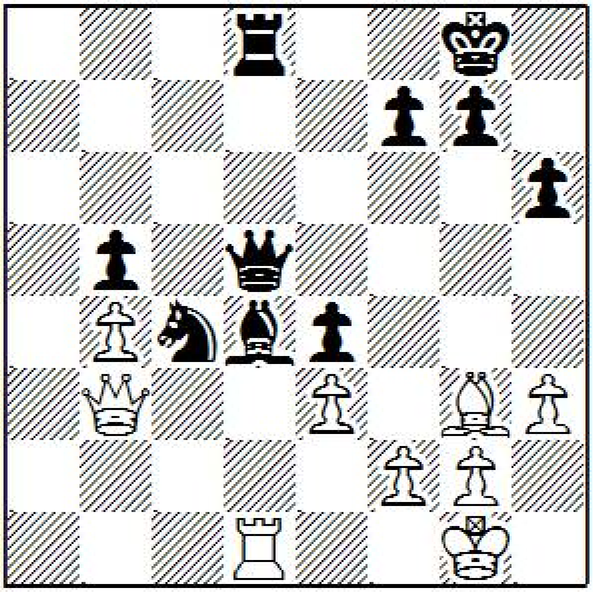
Time-trouble agony. I think that Capa sensed that White was already finished, and he was hoping for a miraculous save.

Indeed, it would not have helped to play either 31 Ne1 Qd2 32 Qc2 (after 32 Kf1 Alekhine gives 32 ... Ra8 33 Rd1 Ra3, but sharper is 32 ... Rd3! 33 Nxd3 exd3 34 Qd1 Qc2 35 Kg1 Nd2 winning) 32 ... Qxc2 33 Nxc2

Rd2 34 Ne1 Na3 and wins, or 31 Nh2 Qd3! 32 Rxb2 (32 Qa2 Qd2) 32 ... Qxb3 33 Rxb3 Rd1+ 34 Nf1 Nd2 35 Ra3 Nxf1! 36 Be5 Nxe3+ also with a won endgame.

31 ... Bxd4 32 Rd1?

The final blunder. However, 32 exd4 Qxd4 33 Bf4 Qd3 was also hopeless.



32 ... Nxe3! 0-1

33 Qxd5 Rxd5 34 Rxd4 (34 fxe3? Bxe3+) 34 ... Rxd4 35 fxe3 Rxb4 is hopeless for White. Alekhine considered this game, along with the 34th, to be his best in the match. To me it in some ways resembles the 10th game of the match in Havana (1921), only there the victim was Lasker: the same uncertain play by the champion in the opening – and the same demonstration of the best aspects of the challenger’s style!

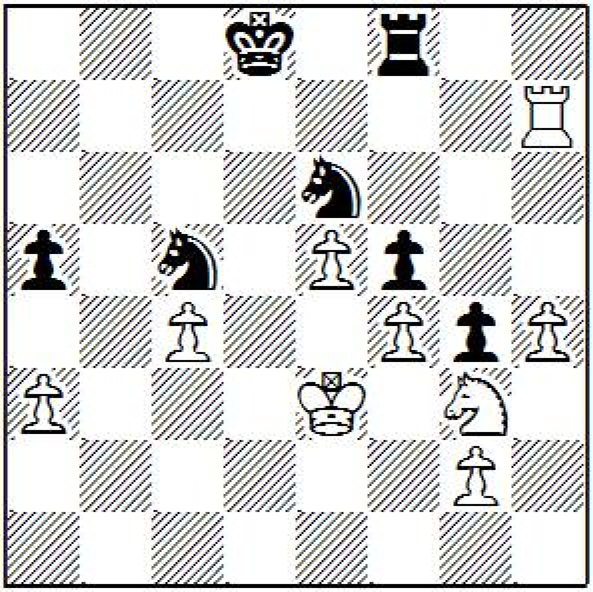
What again told was Alekhine’s superiority in the evaluation of complex, dynamic positions, in the uniting of positional and tactical ideas, or more precisely – those three factors (material, time and quality of position), about which I spoke at the start of the chapter. In intricate, undetermined positions with mutual weaknesses Capablanca’s brilliant intuition gave him trouble, and he would begin losing the thread of the game. Alekhine thought in a more non-standard way, keenly observed the correlation of the weaknesses and which pieces needed to be exchanged, and which retained. This was a serious step forward in the development of chess thinking, and Capa proved to be not ready for it ...

Alekhine was leading 4-2 and Capablanca faced even more acutely the problem that had once tormented Lasker in Havana: how to defeat this incessant challenger? And here fortune smiled on the champion: he saved the very difficult 22nd game. In it too there was a complicated struggle, Alekhine again played very strongly, made a spectacular bishop sacrifice and was close to victory.

Game 129

A.Alekhine-J.R.Capablanca

World Championship Match, Buenos Aires 1927, 22nd game



42 Ra7?

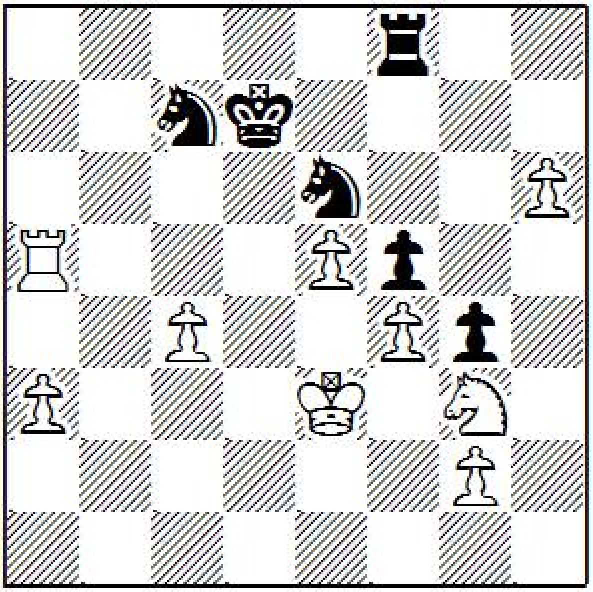
‘An arrogant move, with which White quite needlessly deviates from his predetermined plan, and thus at least makes the win very much less clear. The simple 42 Ne2! would not only have parried the opponent’s only threat (... Nxf4 followed by ... Ne6+ and ... f5-f4+), but would also have brought the white knight into the game with decisive effect. For example, after the likely continuation 42 ... Kc8 43 Nc3 Rd8 44 Nd5 Black could have quite calmly resigned.’ (Alekhine)

42 ... Nc7!! (not 42 ... Nxf4?! 43 Kxf4 Ne6+ 44 Ke3 f4+ 45 Ke4 fxg3 because of 46 Ra8+) **43 Rxa5 N5e6 44 h5?**

This finally throws away the win, although after 44 Ne2 Kd7 45 Nd4 Nxd4 46 Kxd4 Rb8! 47 Ra7 Kc6 48 e6 Kb6 49 Ra4 Nxe6+ 50 Ke5 Re8 51 Kxf5 g3! Black would apparently have saved the game.

44 ... Kd7! 45 h6

If 45 Ne2, then 45 ... Rb8!



45 ... Nxf4! (but now this rescues Black) **46 Kxf4 Ne6+ 47 Ke3 f4+ 48 Kf2 fxg3+ 49 Kxg3 Rh8! 50 Rd5+**

Or 50 Ra7+ Nc7! 51 e6+ Kc6 52 e7 Kb6! equalising.

50 ... Ke7 51 c5 Rxh6 52 c6 Nf8 53 Rc5 Kd8 54 Kxg4 Rg6+ 55 Kf3 Kc7 56 g4 Ne6! (but not 56 ... Rxc6? 57 Rxc6+ Kxc6 58 Ke4) **57 Rd5 Nf8 58 Rc5 Ne6 59 Rd5 Nf8 60 Ra5 Rxc6** with a draw on the 87th move.

The result of this game distressed Alekhine: after all, in the event of him winning the score would have become 5-2, and the match would already have been practically decided. As it was, Capablanca gained a new lease of life, mobilised the remains of his strength and seized the initiative in the match. True, he annoyingly let his opponent off in the 27th game (*Game No.105*), which, in the words of Alekhine, was merely the just retribution for the 22nd, where he ‘threw away an equally elementary and equally well deserved win.’

Then the challenger suffered the most difficult moment in the match: after barely saving the 28th game, he blundered and lost the 29th, in which he had almost achieved a draw by grandiose defence (*Game No.106*), and he was on the edge of the abyss in the 31st (*Game No.107*), where a loss would have cancelled out all his efforts, since the score would have become 4-4 (and at 5-5 Capa would have retained his title). But, fortunately for Alekhine, in an ending with an extra pawn his opponent overlooked the winning move ...

Capablanca arrived for the 32nd game with hardly any strength left. Keenly sensing his condition, Alekhine acted determinedly: he played the Carlsbad Variation aggressively and creatively and, by threatening a direct attack on the king, obtained an endgame with an extra pawn. But here he suddenly returned the pawn to activate his rook, and gave the opponent an excellent drawing chance. Nevertheless, Capa was obviously dejected and on the 34th move he took the wrong pawn! However, in order to win Alekhine still had to overcome a desperate resistance, creating a classic example of the conversion of an advantage in an ending with rook and bishop against rook and bishop.

This was essentially the decisive game of the match. Speaking more broadly, in Buenos Aires there were three pairs of ‘decisive game bunches’: 11th-12th, 21st-22nd and 31st-32nd. The last pair finally broke the Cuban: 3-5 instead of 4-4 and two ruined endgames – failure in the stage which had long been considered Capablanca’s private domain ... In the 33rd game he conceded the white pieces without a fight: a draw in 18 moves. Alekhine testifies: ‘After my win in the previous game the expression of my opponent’s face showed that the outcome of the match was decided.’

Within a couple of days it was all over. For the 34th game Alekhine arrived with a great desire to win, but Capa, although he had become a shadow of himself, defended heroically. The game turned out to be very interesting and, if account is taken of its unique competitive significance, simply remarkable!

Game 130

A.Alekhine-J.R.Capablanca

World Championship Match, Buenos Aires 1927, 34th game

Queen’s Gambit D51

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Nbd7 5 e3 c6 6 a3

A prescription against the Cambridge Springs – Capablanca had also played this earlier. The move is, of course, passive, and Alekhine ‘selected it here merely in order to come out of the book variations as rapidly as possible.’ Apart from 6 Nf3!, 6 Bd3, 6 Qc2 and 6 cxd5 were all tried in the match.

6 ... Be7 7 Nf3 0-0 (7 ... Ne4!?) **8 Bd3 dxc4**

‘A sound alternative was 8 ... h6 9 Bh4 c5.’ (Alekhine)

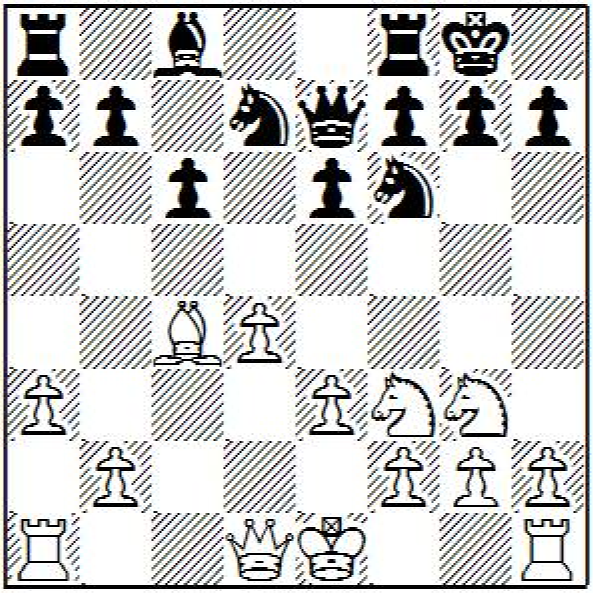
9 Bxc4 Nd5 10 Bxe7 Qxe7

‘10 ... Nxc3 was a strong possibility, e.g. 11 Bxd8 Nxd1 12 Be7 Re8, or 11 Qc2 Qxe7 12 Qxc3 c5 13 0-0 b6, and in both cases Black overcomes his development difficulties.’ (Alekhine) Evidently that is what Black should have played, in order to exchange as many pieces as possible, but Capa thought that in any case he would be able to equalise: the position is a favourable version for Black of his favourite relieving system.

11 Ne4!?

This promises White a more interesting game than 11 Rc1 Nxc3 12 Rxc3 e5 13 dxe5 Nxe5 14 Nxe5 Qxe5 15 0-0 (fifth game) 15 ... Bf5! 16 Qb3 Qe7 17 e4!? Bg6! with equality (Alekhine).

11 ... N5f6 (not bad was 11 ... N5b6 and after the bishop moves – 12 ... e5, but Capa has his plan) **12 Ng3**



12 ... c5

‘The text manoeuvre has the slight drawback of not yet solving the problem of the development of the queen’s bishop.’ (Alekhine) The alternative was the variation 12 ... b6!? 13 0-0 Bb7 14 e4 c5 15 Re1 (15 e5 Ne4!) 15 ... cxd4, analogous to the game Alekhine-Maróczy (San Remo 1930), where instead of a2-a3 the useful move Rc1 had been made.

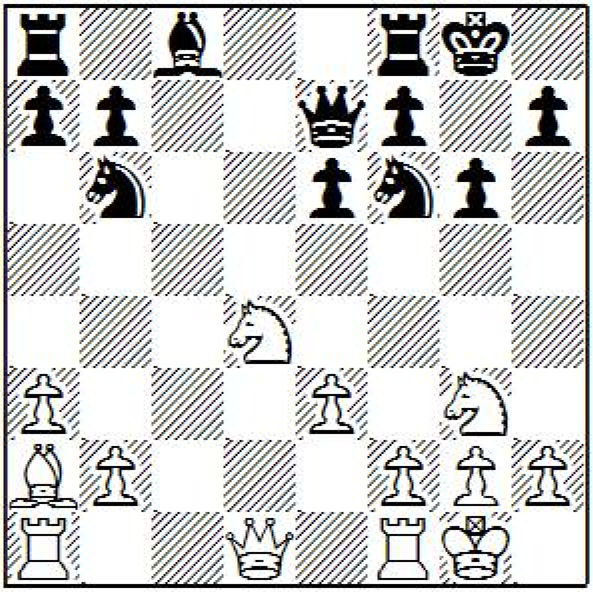
Perhaps even 12 ... e5 would have worked – 13 Nf5 Qe8 14 Nd6 Qe7 15 Nxf7 Rxf7 16 Ng5 Nd5 17 Nxf7 Qxf7! 18 e4 N7b6 19 Ba2 Qg6 etc., but there is no need for such complications.

13 0-0 Nb6

Here too the simplest was 13 ... b6!? According to Alekhine, then 14 d5 is unpleasant, but after 14 ... exd5 15 Bxd5 Nxd5 16 Qxd5 Ba6 the chances are equal: what White wants to do with his knight on g3 is unclear. However, we now know how things stand, whereas then Capa played, as it seemed to him, in the safest way possible.

14 Ba2 cxd4 15 Nxd4 g6!

‘This move is not obvious, but when one considers the situation more closely it is seen to be virtually essential. White was already threatening, e.g. in answer to 15 ... Bd7, to play e3-e4-e5 and win the square d6 for his knight or, if Black counters this with ... e6-e5, to invade f5 and thus establish a stable positional advantage.’ (Alekhine)



16 Rc1 (threatening a possible Nb5) **16 ... Bd7 17 Qe2** (17 Rc7 Qd6! 18 Rxb7? Bc8 would be stupid) **17 ... Rac8 18 e4 e5 19 Nf3 Kg7**

‘The text move, and especially the next one, brings his position suddenly into danger. Black should here exchange both rooks, as after 19 ... Rxc1 20 Rxc1 Rc8 21 Rxc8+ Nxc8 the move 22 Ng5 could have been sufficiently met by 22 ... Be8.’ (Alekhine) But in my opinion, after 22 Qc4! his position would have begun to creak.

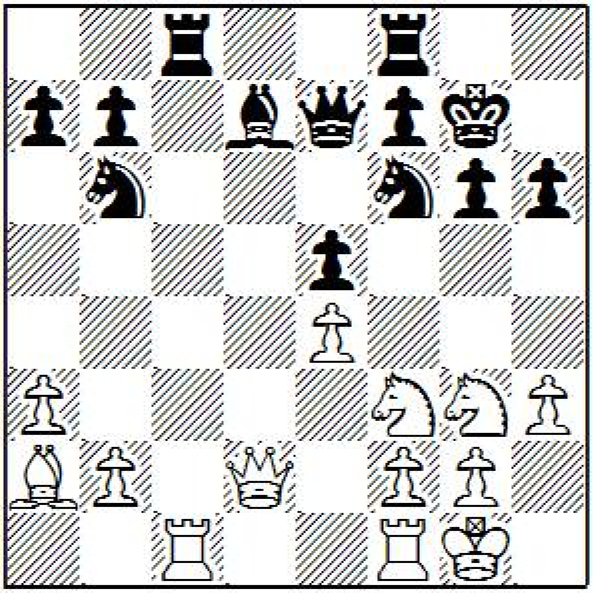
Alekhine also considered 19 ... Bg4!? 20 h3 Bxf3 21 Qxf3, ‘though this would have given cause for concern later on, since the disappearance of the bishop would have weakened the white squares in Black’s camp.’ After 21 ... Rxc1 22 Rxc1 Rc8 23 Qe3 White would have retained a small plus.

20 h3 h6!?

‘This needlessly weakens his position and strengthens the opponent’s reply.’ (Alekhine) But I think that this is a normal move, like the previous one – they were condemned under the impression of the result of the game. 20 ... Rxc1?! 21 Rxc1 Rc8 22 Rxc8 Bxc8 was dubious because of 23 Qb5! (23 Ng5 h6 24 Nxf7? Be6 25 Bxe6 Qxe6 26 Nd8 Qd7 wins for Black) 23 ... Nfd7 24 Qa5 a6 25 Qc3 Qc5 26 Qxc5 Nxc5 27 Nxe5 with advantage to White.

21 Qd2!

A fine, multi-purpose manoeuvre. The main threat is 22 Qa5!



21 ... Be6?!

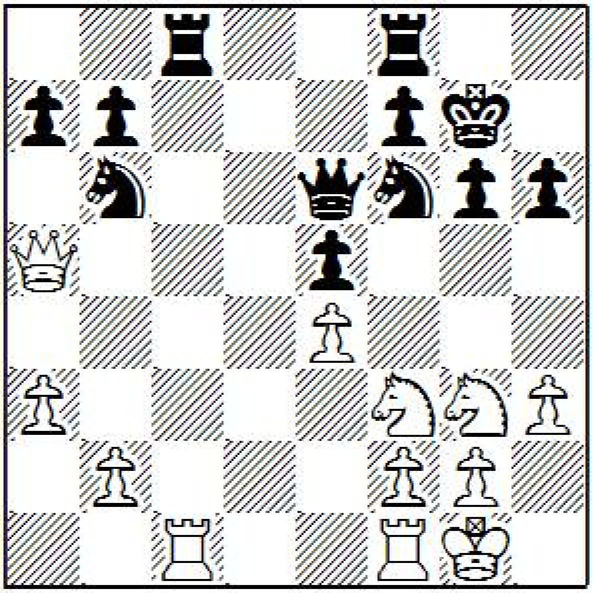
‘There would be no point in trying to simplify the position: 21 ... Rxc1 (*21 ... Rc5 22 Rxc5! Qxc5 23 Rc1 – G. K.*) 22 Rxc1 Rc8 23 Rxc8, and if now 23 ... Nxc8 24 Qc3 or 23 ... Bxc8 24 Qa5, winning a pawn in either case. But the obvious counterattacks 21 ... Bc6 (or 21 ... Bb5) would also be unavailing, for in that case the white queen’s effect would be felt in another way, this time in a surprise mating attack: 22 Nh4!! Nxe4 (*22 ... Kh7? 23 Nhf5; 22 ... Bd7 23 Qa5 Na4 24 Qxa4! Bxa4 25 Nhf5+ gxf5 26 Nxf5+ Kh7 27 Nxe7 – G. K.*) 23 Nhf5+ gxf5 24 Nxf5+ Kg6 25 Qxh6+ Kxf5 26 g4 mate! Or 22 ... Bxe4 23 Qe3! winning a piece.’ (Alekhine) Excuse me, but after 23 ... Rcd8! 24 Nxe4 Nxe4 25 Qxe4 Rd4 the piece is regained, although White does retain the advantage with 26 Nxg6! fxg6 27 Qe3.

‘The only move which offers some prospects of a successful defence is that suggested by Dr Lasker, 21 ... Na4! (22 Qa5 Nxb2 is equal). Then White could have maintained a small positional plus by 22 Rfd1.’ (Alekhine) But after 22 ... Rfd8 it is not clear in what way Black’s position is inferior: 23 Rxc8 Rxc8 24 Bd5 b5 with a level game.

But Capablanca made a concrete simplifying move, very much in his style: he did not like all these uncertainties and calculations! According to Alekhine, now ‘Black loses a pawn without compensation and thus, at least in theory, surrenders the game and also the match.’ But in my opinion the crucial mistake is still to come.

22 Bxe6 Qxe6 23 Qa5

Here it is, the decisive moment of the game and of the match.



23 ... Nc4?

‘Or 23 ... Qb3 24 Qxe5 (*24 Nxe5 Rxc1 25 Rxc1 Qxb2 26 Nd3 Qd4 27 Qxa7 Qxd3 28 Qxb6 Nxe4 is equal – G. K.*) 24 ... Nc4 25 Qd4, and White hangs on to the plundered pawn.’ (Alekhine) However, 24 ... Rfe8! is much stronger, for example: 25 Nd4! (25 Qd4 Rcd8 26 Nd2 Qb5) 25 ... Rxe5 26 Nxb3 Nxe4 27 Rxc8 Nxg3! 28 Rc7 Nxf1 29 Kxf1 Rb5 30 Nd4 Rxb2 31 Rxb7 a5 32 Nc6 a4 33 Ne5 Nc4 34 Rxb2 Nxb2 35 Ke2 f6 36 Nd3 Nc4 with equality. The variation is, of course, a conditional one, but in other branches, too, no direct win for White is apparent and things are closer to a draw.

In addition, also possible was 23 ... Nbd7!? 24 Qxa7 Qb3 25 Qe3 (25 Rfd1 Ra8 26 Qe3 Qxb2 27 Nh4 Rh8) 25 ... Qxb2 26 Nh4! (or 26 Rb1 Qc3) 26 ... Kh7 27 Nhf5 Ng8 28 Rb1 Qc3 29 Nd6 Qxe3 30 fxe3 Rc3 31 Rxb7 Ngf6. Here Black holds on with difficulty, but nevertheless he holds on!

At any event, both these moves – 23 ... Qb3 and 23 ... Nbd7 – maintain material equality, whereas now Black loses a pawn.

24 Qxa7 Nxb2

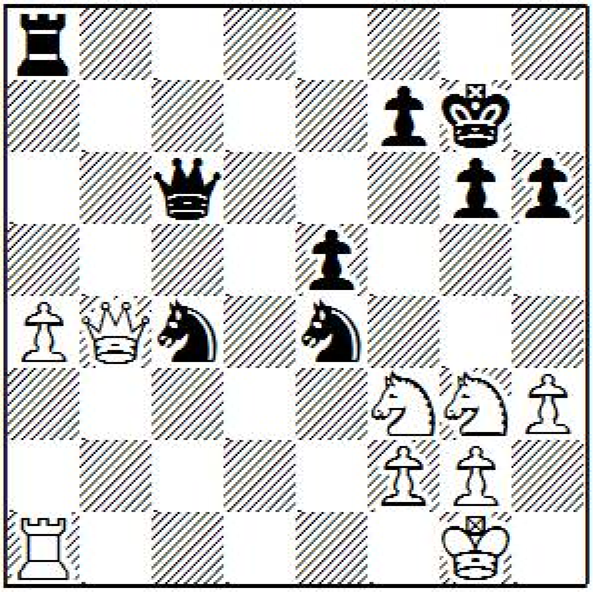
No better is 24 ... b5 25 b3 Nd6 26 Qe3, while if 24 ... Ra8, then 25 Qc5! (but not 25 Qxb7? Rfb8 26 Qc7 Rc8 equalising) 25 ... Nxb2 26 Nxe5 Rfc8 27 Qd4 wins.

25 Rxc8 Rxc8 26 Qxb7 Nc4 27 Qb4 Ra8 28 Ra1 (28 a4!?) **28 ... Qc6!**

'Threatening to blockade the a-pawn by 29 ... Ra4 and also (at least apparently) to win the e4-pawn. But White's two next moves put the situation in the true light.' (Alekhine)

29 a4! Nxe4

Interesting tactical duels now begin.



30 Nxe5!

'Avoiding the pitfall 30 Nxe4 Qxe4 31 Rc1 Rc8 32 Nxe5? (32 Nd2? Nxd2) 32 ... Ne3!! 33 Qxe4 Rxc1+ 34 Kh2 Nf1+ followed by ... Ng3+ and ... Nxe4, after which Black could even win.' (Alekhine) However, I am not sure that after 32 a5! Black is able to stop the swiftly advancing a-pawn: 32 ... Qf4 33 Rc3 Rc6 34 Qa4 Rc8 35 a6 etc. Alekhine played more solidly, retaining his extra pawn: after all, what was being decided was a matter of vital importance ...

30 ... Qd6!

'Taking play into a heavy piece endgame, where, as is known, it is very hard to convert a pawn advantage.' (Kotov) Inferior was 30 ... Nxe5 31

Qxe4 Qc3 32 Rb1.

31 Qxc4 Qxe5 32 Re1 Nd6 33 Qc1!

Convincing play. Both 33 Rxe5? Nxc4 and 33 Qb4? Rxa4 (with equal chances in each case) were bad for White.

33 ... Qf6 (33 ... Qd4 or 33 ... Qa5 – 34 Rd1) **34 Ne4! Nxe4 35 Rxe4**

'I envisaged this position when playing 29 a4. The winning procedure consists in combining the threats connected with the passed pawn and an attack against the somewhat exposed black king. First and foremost, White will succeed in controlling the important diagonal a1-h8.' (Alekhine)

35 ... Rb8

Hinting at ... Rb2. If 35 ... Ra5, White, after first playing g2-g3 and h3-h4, would 'then invade the back rank with his pieces.'

36 Re2! (36 a5?! Qf5!) **36 ... Ra8 37 Ra2 Ra5 38 Qc7!** (38 Qa1!?) **38 ... Qa6**

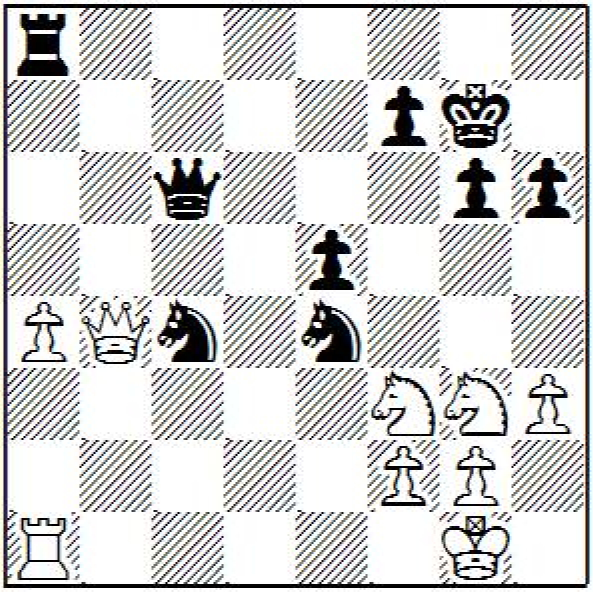
'The only way to prevent the advance of the passed pawn.' (Alekhine) But in my opinion, White could have been disturbed more by the attempt to set up a blockade by 38 ... Rg5!? 39 Ra3 Rf5 40 Qc2 Ra5.

39 Qc3+ Kh7 40 Rd2!

'Skilfully relieving the blockade of the passed pawn. There is a threat not only of 41 Rd8 with an immediate win, but also of 41 Rd7 leading to a sustained harassment of the enemy king.' (Alekhine)

40 ... Qb6

40 ... Rxa4? 41 Rd8 g5 42 Qh8+ Kg6 43 Qe5 etc. was hopeless. Here the first time control was reached, and the game was adjourned.



41 Rd7

The sealed move. The following day, during the resumption, Capablanca fought on to the last bullet ...

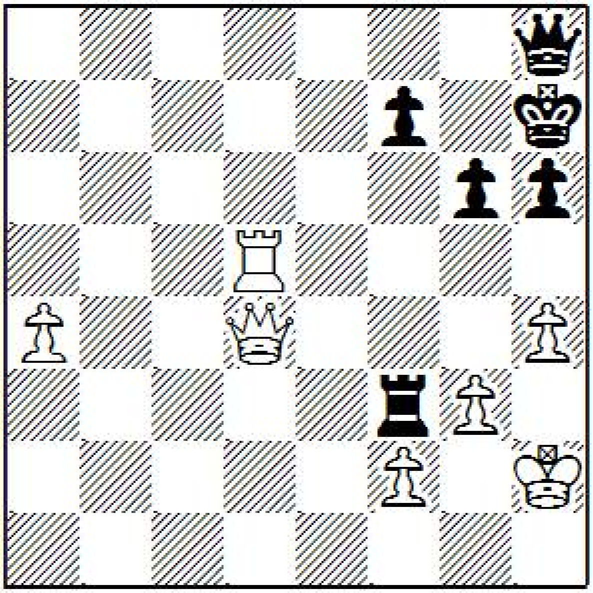
47 ... Qb1+ 42 Kh2 Qb8+ 43 g3 Rf5 44 Qd4! (with the threat of 45 a5 and Rd8) **44 ... Qe8 45 Rd5!** (but not 45 Rd8? Rxf2+ 46 Qxf2 Qxd8 47 Qxf7+ Kh8) **45 ... Rf3**

Going into the queen ending was, of course, hopeless.

46 h4!

‘46 a5 Qe2 47 Kg2 was also feasible (*or 46 Kg2 Ra3 47 Rd7 – G. K.*). However, before undertaking anything decisive, White wants to stabilise the pawn position on the kingside.’ (Alekhine)

46 ... Qh8!? (46 ... h5 47 a5!)



47 Qb6!

47 Qxh8+ Kxh8 48 Kg2 was premature because of 48 ... Ra3, when after 49 a5 it would have been far harder for White to win than in the game: the enemy rook is behind the passed pawn!

47 ... Qa1

If 47 ... Qa8 decisive was 48 Rd8 Rxf2+ (48 ... Qxa4 49 Qb2) 49 Qxf2 Qxd8 50 Qxf7+ Kh8 51 Qxg6 Qd2+ 52 Kh3 Qd7+ 53 Qg4.

48 Kg2 Rf6

After 48 ... Ra3 White would have won by 49 Rd7 Kg8 (49 ... Kg7 50 Qb7 Qf6 51 Rxf7+! Qxf7 52 Qb2+; 49 ... Qa2 50 Qf6) 50 Qd8+ Kg7 51 Qe7 Qa2 52 Qe5+ Kh7 53 Qf6.

49 Qd4!

'Now the right moment to exchange has come, as it is the *white* rook that will get behind the passed pawn.' (Alekhine) White's conduct of the technical stage of the game cannot be praised too highly.

49 ... Qxd4 50 Rxd4 Kg7 (if 50 ... Ra6, then simply 51 Kf3 and then Ke4-d5: the rook at d4 holds everything under control) **51 a5 Ra6 52 Rd5 Rf6 53 Rd4 Ra6 54 Ra4**

The rook takes up its 'lawful' place, which signifies the beginning of the end.

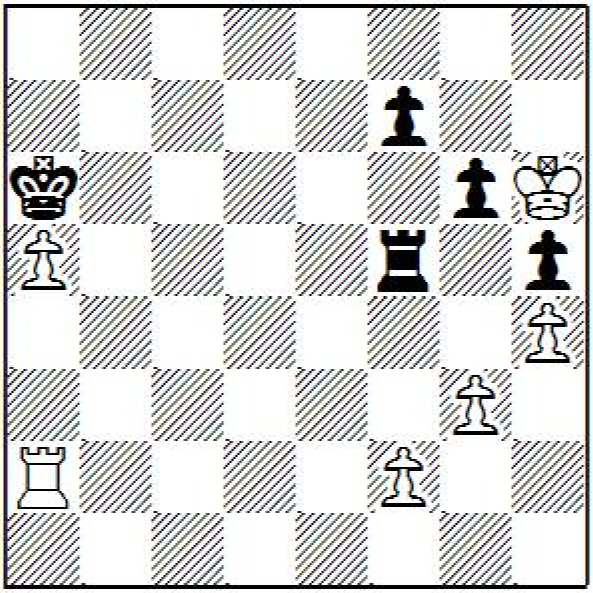
54 ... Kf6 55 Kf3 Ke5 56 Ke3 h5 57 Kd3 Kd5 58 Kc3 Kc5 59 Ra2 Kb5 60 Kb3

‘White makes use of every opportunity, by repetition of moves, to gain time with the clock, so as to avoid a slip just before the capture of the title.’ (Alekhine)

60 ... Kc5 61 Kc3 Kb5 62 Kd4! (the start of the decisive attack on the kingside pawns) **62 ... Rd6+**

Or 62 ... Kb4 63 Ra1! Kb3 64 Kc5 and wins.

63 Ke5 Re6+ 64 Kf4 Ka6 (if 64 ... f6, then 65 a6! Rxa6 66 Rxa6 Kxa6 67 Ke4 wins – Tartakower) **65 Kg5 Re5+ 66 Kh6 Rf5**



67 f4

‘Understandably excited in sight of my desired goal, I lengthened the struggle with this over-hasty pawn move (up to here I believe that I found the correct move all the way through this decisive game). The simplest was 67 Kg7! Rf3 68 Kg8 Rf6 69 Kf8! Rf3 (69 ... Rf5 70 f4) 70 Kg7 Rf5 71 f4 and Black would have to resign.’ (Alekhine)

67 ... Rc5! 68 Ra3 Rc7 (68 ... Rf5 69 Kg7 and Re3-e5) **69 Kg7**

After 69 f5 Tartakower suggests 69 ... Rc6! 70 Kg7 gxf5 71 Kxf7 f4! 72 gxf4 Rc4, but here 73 f5 Rxh4 74 f6 concludes matters.

69 ... Rd7 70 f5

‘This breakthrough does of course also win, but a more forceful way was 70 Kf6! Rc7 71 f5 gxf5 (or 71 ... Rc6+ 72 Kxf7 gxf5 73 Rf3) 72 Kxf5 Rc5+ 73 Kf6 Rc7 74 Rf3 Kxa5 75 Rf5+ and wins.’ (Alekhine)

70 ... gxf5 71 Kh6 f4 72 gxf4 Rd5 73 Kg7 Rf5 74 Ra4 Kb5 75 Re4! (it is time to give up the a-pawn) **75 ... Ka6 76 Kh6**

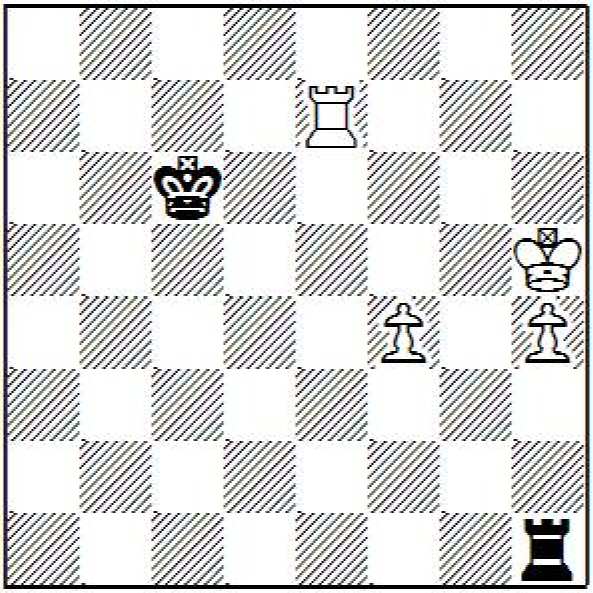
According to Tartakower, White would also have won by 76 Kg8 Rf6 (76 ... Kb7 77 Re7+ Ka6 78 Rxf7) 77 Kf8 Kxa5 (77 ... Rf5 78 Kg7 – zugzwang) 78 Ke7!

76 ... Rxa5

‘Finally accepting the inevitable.’ (Alekhine) After 77 ... Kb7 (or 76 ... Ka7) White wins by both the cheerful 77 Re5 Rxf4 78 Kxh5 Rf1 79 Rc5 f5 (79 ... Rf6 80 Kg4) 80 Kg5 f4 81 Rf5 f3 82 Kg4, and the cold-blooded 77 Kg7 Ka6 78 Kg8 Rf6 79 Kf8 Kxa5 (79 ... Rf5 80 Kg7) 80 Ke7 Rb6 (80 ... Rf5 81 Re5+) 81 Kxf7.

77 Re5 Ra1 78 Kxh5 Rg1 79 Rg5 Rh1 80 Rf5 Kb6 81 Rxf7 Kc6 82 Re7 1-0

Here the game was again adjourned, and Capablanca’s sad words flew right round the world: ‘I think that Alekhine is bound to win ... ’



The following day, 29th November, without resuming the game, Black resigned. The Cuban sent by messenger a letter written in French:

‘Dear Mr Alekhine! I resign the game. You are therefore the world champion. Please accept my congratulations and best wishes ... Yours sincerely, J. R. Capablanca.’

Later the ex-champion nevertheless went to the chess club and congratulated his opponent personally: they shook hands and embraced to a storm of applause. But attendance at the farewell banquet on 8th December, where Alekhine was proclaimed champion, was already unbearable for Capa ...

Generally speaking, apart from the first and third games, all of the wins in this match were achieved in a fierce, tenacious struggle – this was chess on a grand scale! Behind the abundance of draws, few realised that this was an unusual match and that a new era in chess was beginning. However, this did not escape the attention of the wise Lasker, a witness of various eras.

First he congratulated the new champion. ‘I welcome the brilliant victory of Alekhine, who has realised the burning dream of Chigorin, of whom he is a direct descendent, both by the fervour of his genius and by the temperament of his play.’ And then he declared: ‘The conclusions from the match for the entire chess world are enormous: a *rejuvenating* not only of strategic principles or theoretical variations, but also of the culture of the game itself, a rejuvenating which had become obviously *necessary,* in order to avoid the stagnation threatening our art!’

The match showed that the post-Steinitz era of purely classical chess was ending – and a new game was beginning. Whereas Capablanca gained his victories by rising above numb banalities, Alekhine simply played another sort of chess! In Buenos Aires his creative credo definitively took shape ...

Also interesting is the observation of Réti, who commented that Alekhine skilfully directed the match along ‘lines, set by Lasker – along the lines of psychological struggle’ and ‘he showed (we, however, already knew this) that he is a better psychologist than Capablanca.’ And indeed, Capa clearly underestimated the role of the psychological factor, whereas Alekhine followed in Lasker’s footsteps, saying:

‘For my victory over Capablanca I am indebted primarily to my superiority in the field of psychology. Capablanca played, relying almost exclusively on his rich intuitive talent. But for the chess struggle nowadays one needs a subtle knowledge of human nature, an understanding of the opponent’s psychology. Earlier they fought only with the pieces, but we also fight with the opponent – with his will, his nerves, his individual peculiarities, and – last but not least – with his vanity. This plays an extremely important role ... ’

Capa admitted that ‘in this match there was a fierce struggle and my opponent played better, and hence he deserved his success.’ Alekhine also put down his victory to better play, adding that he ‘played like he had never played in his life’. However, years later, after the death of the Cuban, he was to write: ‘How did it happen that Capablanca lost the match? I have to admit that I still cannot give an exact reply to this question, since in 1927 I did not think that I was superior to my opponent. Possibly the main cause of his defeat was an exaggerated impression of his own strength, arising after his crushing victory in New York 1927, and an underestimation of my strength.’

More precisely, the decisive role was played by that factor about which I have already spoken: all his life victory had come to Capa comparatively easily, and he was not accustomed to strongly exerting himself – and in the match with Alekhine (this is where the underestimation told!) he realised *too late* that he would really have to exert himself ...

Early in 1928 Alekhine returned triumphantly to Paris, where he appeared in the Palais Royale, the Rotonde, the Café de la Régence, and of course the Russian Club – the cultural centre of Russians abroad, where a splendid reception was arranged in his honour. The following morning the Paris émigré newspapers quoted a toast he had made: ‘That the myth of the invincibility of the Bolsheviks should be dispelled, just as the myth of Capablanca’s invincibility had been dispelled!’

Moscow reacted instantly – in the words of the same state prosecutor Krylenko: ‘After his speech in the Russian Club we are finished with citizen Alekhine – he is our enemy and from now on we will regard him only as an enemy.’ Take note: this was obvious progress compared with 1925, when Alekhine was only ‘an alien element’ ...

A Convenient Opponent

Of course, Capa was eager to regain the crown. How this return match did not come about is a truly like a detective story, and I will try at least partially to reproduce the chronological sequence of events.

12 December 1927. The last meeting of Alekhine with Capablanca in Buenos Aires, at which they discuss the conditions for a new match and the ex-champion suggests limiting the number of games, but the champion replies that 'he was fundamentally opposed to any changes in the rules.' But, according to Alekhine, they part amicably.

End of January 1928. 'I am sure that Capablanca will challenge me to a return match,' Alekhine declares in Paris. 'I will accept a challenge on the conditions of the previous match and I will undertake to play the new match no later than a year from the moment that the official challenge is received. Capablanca is returning to New York in February – it follows that in March I can expect a challenge from him.'

February 1928. A fatal delay by Capablanca: he sends a letter to the FIDE President Rueb (and a copy to Alekhine) with the suggestion that the rules for future matches for the world championship should be changed: the first to win six games, but not more than 16 games, after which the player leading will be declared the champion, and in the event of a draw the champion will retain his title.

29 February 1928. Alekhine replies with an angry open letter to Capablanca: 'Having lost the title, you want to change the conditions that you yourself imposed in London on all your future opponents. And you go in for this, knowing of my categorical refusal to change the rules! You suggest limiting the number of games to 16, referring to your "experience" in Buenos Aires. Although in our match I could essentially have been the winner at any moment, beginning with the 12th game, I think that neither I, nor the entire chess world, would have been satisfied with such a victory ... Do you really think that in a return match I will allow conditions that reduce chess to a game of roulette?'

4 April – 5 May 1928. Bogoljubow wins a match against Euwe for the title of FIDE champion (5½-4½). Rueb announces that 'he sympathises with the views expressed by Alekhine,' and suggests that henceforward, after the return match, matches should be played every three years, the first to score four wins and not more than 25 games; moreover that each year FIDE will decide on the four best grandmasters, and the first of them will be named as the official challenger for the world championship; now this should be considered to be Bogoljubow.

Mid-May 1928. The British Chess Federation introduces its project, restricting a match for the crown to 20 games. Alekhine, who is touring

England, states that FIDE’s aim ‘to take power into its hands’ is premature and that in principle he is ready to play with any outstanding master, but for the moment he gives preference to the two ex-champions – Capablanca and Lasker, in view of their past successes and enormous prestige; besides, he has promised to play a return match with Capablanca under the previous conditions, so that others must wait ...

5 August 1928. At the 5th FIDE Congress in The Hague, Bogoljubow is confirmed as the FIDE champion and the official challenger for the world championship. It is decided that the match regulations should be modified by a special commission, which will include Alekhine. At the closing banquet the world champion announces that he is agreeable to playing a third match with Capablanca under the conditions worked out jointly with FIDE, but that a second match can proceed only under the previous conditions.

Mid-August 1928. Capablanca’s representative Dr Lederer (the organiser of the 1924 and 1927 New York tournaments) sends Alekhine a letter, in which he states that his client is ready to play a return match under the previous conditions. In reply Alekhine demands an official written challenge from Capablanca himself.

24 August 1928. Bogoljubow wins the strong tournament in Bad Kissingen, a point ahead of Capablanca (despite another defeat in their individual game). And on *28 August* he sends Alekhine an official challenge to a match for the world championship and asks for a reply as to whether the champion agrees ‘to play this match during 1929’.

11 September 1928. Alekhine replies to Bogoljubow’s letter: ‘In principle I accept your challenge – the first since I won the title – and I do not object to the match taking place in 1929. It goes without saying that the match can proceed only under the conditions of the London agreement (1922), which, incidentally, was signed by us both.’

End of September 1928. Bogoljubow travels specially to Bern, where Alekhine is on tour, and discusses with the champion the question of the dates and conditions of the coming match.

8 October 1928. After arriving at the tournament in Berlin, Capablanca sends Alekhine an official challenge for a match ‘under the London rules of 1922’.

12 October 1928. Alekhine instantly replies that he has already accepted a challenge from Bogoljubow, but that he will also take

Capablanca’s challenge into account. That same day he sends a letter to Bogoljubow: ‘Dear Sir, I have received an official challenge from J. R. Capablanca, and in view of this new factor I ask you in the three-month period that expires on 15 January 1929 to deposit the sum of $500 stipulated in the London rules ... If this sum will not be deposited, I will consider myself obliged to accept the challenge of Capablanca.’

23 December 1928 – 6 January 1929. Bogoljubow wins a second match against Euwe (again 5½-4½). The challenger experiences serious difficulties in raising not only the prize fund for the match, but even the deposit of $500. And in early January Alekhine visits Amsterdam, where he holds discussions with Bogoljubow and the Dutch organisers. Then the Dutch travel to see Alekhine in Paris.

10 January 1929. Dutch players raise and deposit for Bogoljubow the necessary sum of $500, of which Alekhine is immediately informed.

13 January 1929. Alekhine replies to the Dutch that he has received their notification and on the same day he expresses to Capablanca his ‘regret at it being impossible to accept at the given moment his challenge of 8.10.1928.’

March 1929. ‘If the remaining sum is raised, the Alekhine-Bogoljubow match will take place in the second half of 1929,’ writes the chess magazine *Shakhmatny Listok*. ‘Thus Alekhine will have obtained what he wanted, and the return match with Capablanca, which he did not much relish, is deferred not only for the whole of 1929, but also, apparently, for a highly indefinite period.’

First half of 1929. In a number of interviews Alekhine explains his decision as being due to Capablanca’s intractability and, in particular, he states: ‘A fight with Bogoljubow interests me far more than a match with Capablanca. Bogoljubow plays completely differently to Capablanca, and he is a more dangerous opponent. He is an outstanding master of the opening; his play is notable for its exceptional boldness.’

9 July 1929. In Wiesbaden an agreement on the Alekhine-Bogoljubow match is signed, differing from the London rules (cf. p.299): play is to a maximum of 30 games, but the winner must score at least six wins; irrespective of the outcome of the match, Alekhine is to receive $6,000, and Bogoljubow all that is raised above this sum. Later it was said that the challenger had not in fact raised the $10,000 and that he would play only for the title.

30 July – 27 August 1929. At the most important tournament of the year in Carlsbad, Capa shares second place (behind Nimzowitsch), while Bogoljubow, who has decided to unwind before the match, finishes eighth. Alekhine is present at the tournament in the capacity of correspondent for the *New York Times* (before this he played in two small events, one a lightning tournament, with an overall score of +15 =2). The organisers allow him to cross the barrier and stroll among the participants – Capablanca twice protests, but in vain ... The champion and the ex-champion no longer greet each other and are not on speaking terms.

End of August 1929. In an interview for the same *New York Times* Capablanca declares: 'I hope that the match in Wiesbaden will not end in failure, as some are forecasting, and that the winner will not try to avoid a battle with me. I am ready to play anyone and at any time ... Alekhine, after stating that he would play a match only on the conditions of the London agreement (i.e. up to six wins, draws not counting), will play with Bogoljubow a limited number of games. He has thereby abandoned his previous point of view, that such a match is a game of roulette.'

6 September – 12 November 1929. Alekhine wins the match against Bogoljubow ahead of schedule – 15½-9½ (+11 -5 =9). Incidentally, this was the first World Championship match in 19 years to be held in Europe.

It is time, however, to interrupt our diary and take an unprejudiced look at the champion's dangerous opponent Efim Dmitrievich Bogoljubow (1889-1952), who was born and grew up in the Ukraine, at the age of 18 entered the Kiev Polytechnic Institute, but soon abandoned his studies for the sake of chess. At the All-Union master tournament of 1913/14 he gained the master title, played in Mannheim and, as I have already described, after the start of the War was interned together with other Russian players in Triberg, where he married and where his wife bore him two daughters.

After the War Bogoljubow quickly progressed into one of the five leading grandmasters in the world, as indicated by his +4 -5 =3 in a match with Rubinstein (Sweden 1920) and also his tournament victories in Pistyan 1922 (ahead of Alekhine), Carlsbad 1923 (together with Alekhine and Maróczy) and especially Moscow 1925 (ahead of Lasker and Capablanca). After returning in 1924 to the USSR, he had time to win two championships of the country, but when the authorities prohibited him from playing in Merano 1926 (in Italy the objectionable Mussolini was in power) he gave up his Soviet citizenship and became a naturalised German. It need hardly be said that the All-Russian chess section, after calling ‘citizen Bogoljubow a renegade, who has followed the steps of Alekhine,’ excluded him from their ranks and deprived him of his title of USSR champion ...

I will give two opinions about Bogoljubow’s style. ‘The main trait of his character, his alpha and omega, is unbounded optimism. In this respect he is the image of Chigorin, who too was always convinced that he was about to win.’ (Spielmann) ‘Capablanca pulverises his opponents, Alekhine fights, Lasker thinks, while Bogoljubow fantasises in chess ... A whole book could be written about him, but two words are also sufficient: *amazing practician!* Against this intense stream of plans, ideas and combinations even the strongest opponents find it hard to hold out, and the weaker ones almost always die like flies.’ (Tartakower)

‘Bogoljubow is aggressive and enterprising,’ wrote Alekhine before the match. ‘In our understanding of the essence of chess we have a certain similarity, but we have very different views both on life, and on the principles of the struggle. He regards his opponent as an excellent experimental field for applying his skill and never tries to study his opponent. He often hopes for a miracle, where what is needed is knowledge ... He considers the main aim of the struggle to be his personal satisfaction. But my understanding of the struggle has always been the opposite. For success I consider that three factors are necessary: firstly, an awareness of my own strengths and weaknesses; secondly, an accurate understanding of my opponent’s strengths and weaknesses; thirdly, a higher aim than momentary satisfaction. I see this aim as being scientific and artistic achievements, which place the game of chess on a par with other arts.’

The very first game set the tone of the entire match. The champion won with a swift and spectacular attack, but the initial stage was very feebly played by his opponent – ‘an outstanding master of the opening’ ...

Game 131

A.Alekhine-E.Bogoljubow

World Championship Match, Germany/Holland 1929, 1st game

Slav Defence D16

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 dxc4 5 a4 e6?

‘It has been my peculiar luck that this illogical move (instead of the natural 5 ... Bf5) has been adopted against me, with a disastrous effect, no less than four times, namely (besides the present game) by Bogoljubow again (Nottingham 1936), by Dr Euwe (19th matchgame, 1935) and by the late German master, Helling, in Dresden 1936.’ (Alekhine)

6 e4 Bb4 (Black also fails to equalise by 6 ... c5 7 e5 Nd5 8 Bxc4 Nc6 9 0-0 cxd4 10 Nxd4! etc.) **7 e5 Nd5**

In the three aforementioned games 7 ... Ne4 8 Qc2 Qd5 9 Be2 was played, also with advantage to White.

8 Bd2 Bxc3

‘If instead 8 ... b5, then 9 Ne4 Be7 10 b3! etc., winning back the pawn with decidedly the better position.’ (Alekhine) But, according to Kotov, here it was still possible somehow to hold on: 10 ... Nd7 11 bxc4 bxc4 12 Bxc4 N7b6 13 Be2 (13 Bb3 Ba6) 13 ... a5 14 0-0 Nb4.

9 bxc3 b5 10 Ng5!

A powerful attacking manoeuvre: Ne4-d6+ is threatened and it is dangerous for Black to castle.

10 ... f6

A serious weakening. If nevertheless 10 ... 0-0?! (10 ... Nxc3? 11 Qf3!), then 11 Qb1! and 12 axb5! No better is 10 ... h6?! 11 Ne4 0-0 12 Qh5 (12 Nd6!?) 12 ... f6 (12 ... f5 13 Nd6) 13 Qg6 Kh8 14 Nd6 Qd7 15 h4!, but 10 ... Qe7 is perhaps more tenacious.

11 exf6! Nxf6?

And this is already catastrophic. Essential was 11 ... gxf6! (but not 11 ... Qxf6? 12 axb5 cxb5 13 Ne4 etc.) 12 Qh5+ Kd7 13 Ne4 Qe8 14 Qh4 Qg6 with an inferior, but defensible position (Bolbochan-Letelier, Mar del Plata 1952).

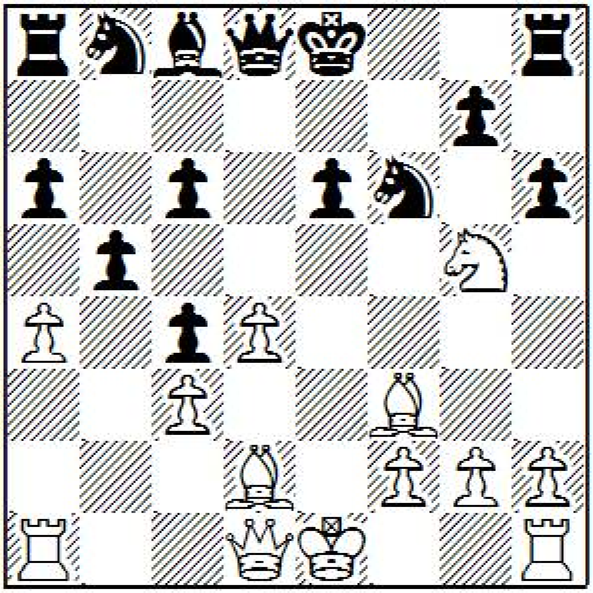
12 Be2 a6

‘12 ... 0-0 13 axb5 h6 (13 ... cxb5 14 Bf3 Nd5 15 Qb1) 14 b6! Qxb6 (14 ... hxg5 15 Rxa7!) 15 Nf3 Ba6 16 Ne5 would prove positionally hopeless in the long run.’ (Alekhine)

13 Bf3! (threatening 14 axb5) **13 ... h6**

If 13 ... Nd5 Alekhine gives 14 Qb1 g6 15 Nxh7 Rxh7 16 Qxg6+ Rf7 17 Bh5 and 18 Qg8+, and if 13 ... Ra7 – 14 Bf4 Rb7 (*14 ... Qb6 15 Bd6 – G. K.*) 15 axb5 axb5 16 Ra8 with a winning attack’. For example: 16 ... Bd7

17 Bd6 Qc8 18 Bh5+ g6 19 Qf3 Nd5 20 Qf7+ Kd8 21 Bf3 Re8 22 Qf6+ Nxf6 23 Nf7 mate.



14 Bh5+ Nxh5 (14 ... Ke7 15 Nf7 Qe8 16 Nxh8 Nxh5 17 Qg4 wins) **15 Qxh5+ Kd7 16 Nf7 Qe8 17 Qg6! Rg8 18 Bf4**

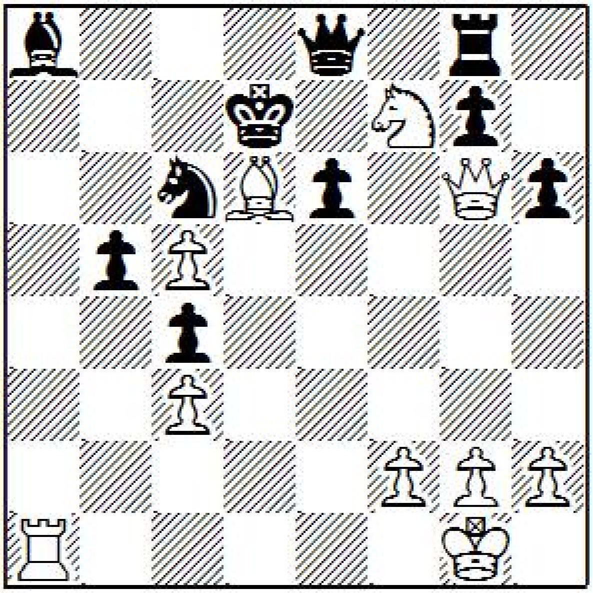
At this moment – an unprecedented occurrence! – Alekhine was stung by a wasp. Which, however, did not help Black ...

18 ... Bb7 (if 18 ... Rf8, then 19 Ne5+ Kd8 20 Qe4) **19 Bg3 Ke7 20 Bd6+**

‘A bit of cat-and-mouse play.’ (Alekhine) Precisely!

20 ... Kd7 21 0-0 c5 (desperation) **22 dxc5 Bd5** (22 ... Nc6 23 Rfd1) **23 axb5 axb5 24 Rxa8 Bxa8 25 Ra1 Nc6**

Or 25 ... Bb7 26 Ra7 Kc8 27 Bg3 winning.



26 Ne5+! 1-0

26 ... Nxe5 (26 ... Kc8 27 Rxa8+) 27 Ra7+ Kc6 28 Qe4 mate! In all sincerity, Capablanca would not have succumbed in such fashion ...

True, after two tenacious and lengthy draws, Bogoljubow managed to level the scores in the fourth game. But in the fifth he again lost – and this time, in a classic, textbook endgame, with the same bishop, shut out of play, as in his game with Capablanca (*Game No.99*).

Nowadays everyone knows what is meant by a shut-in bishop, but then the methods of punishment were only beginning to be discovered – exchanges and the transition into an ending, where the ‘extra’ piece can be exploited. Alekhine very subtly sensed this entire conception, although he committed an inaccuracy in the conversion of his advantage.

Game 132

A.Alekhine-E.Bogoljubow

World Championship Match, Germany/Holland 1929, 5th game

Slav Defence D17

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 dxc4 5 a4 Bf5 (instead of 5 ... e6? – *Game No.131*) **6 Ne5!?**

An aggressive sortie, known from the time of the game Nimzowitsch-Sämisch (Marienbad 1925). 6 e3 is quieter.

6 ... e6

Already known then was the plan, which is still of current interest, with 6 ... Nbd7 7 Nxc4 Qc7 and ... e7-e5 (Capablanca-Vidmar, Carlsbad 1929), which was later tested in the Alekhine-Euwe matches. We will return to it again in the second volume.

7 Bg5

The third game went 7 f3 c5 8 dxc5 (more is promised by 8 e4!?) 8 ... Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 Bxc5 10 e4 Bg6 11 Bxc4 Nc6! 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Bf4, and here Black could have equalised by 13 ... Nd7! with the idea of ... e6-e5 and ... f7-f6 (and if 14 e5, then 14 ... Nb6 and ... Nd5).

After 7 f3, 7 ... Bb4 is also played, for example: 8 Bg5 h6! 9 Bxf6 (9 Bh4 c5 10 dxc5 Qxd1+ 11 Kxd1 Nbd7 etc.) 9 ... gxf6 10 Nxc4 c5 11 dxc5 Qxd1+ 12 Rxd1 Bc2 13 Rc1 Bb3 14 Nd2 Bxc3 15 Rxc3 Bxa4 16 e4 Ke7 equalising (Euwe-Alekhine, Holland 11th matchgame 1937), while in recent times the sharp variation 8 e4 Bxe4 9 fxe4 Nxe4 10 Bd2 Qxd4 11 Nxe4 Qxe4+ 12 Qe2 Bxd2+ 13 Kxd2 Qd5+ has been exhaustively analysed.

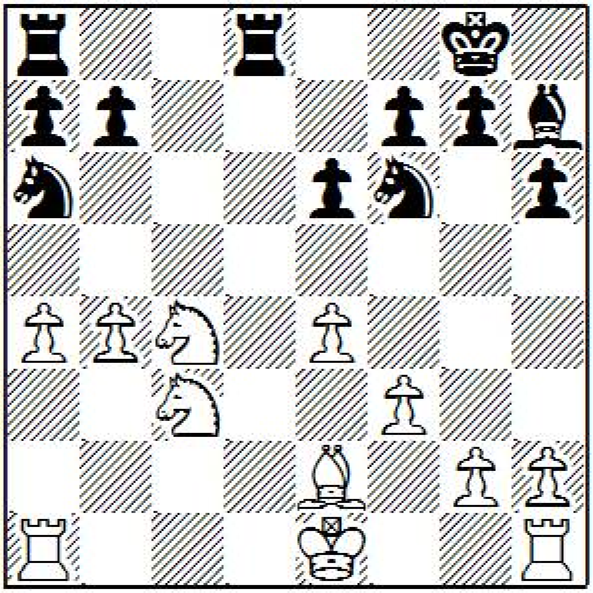
7 ... Be7?!

Of course, more active is 7 ... Bb4 8 Nxc4 (8 f3 h6!, as in the previous paragraph) 8 ... Qd5 9 Bxf6 (9 Qb3!? Na6 10 0-0-0) 9 ... Qxc4 (9 ... gxf6!?) 10 Qd2 gxf6 11 e4 Qb3 12 exf5 Nd7 13 fxe6 fxe6 14 Be2 0-0-0 equalising (Alekhine-Euwe, Holland 2nd matchgame 1937).

8 f3 h6 9 e4! (a surprise!) **9 ... Bh7**

Unsuitable is 9 ... hxg5? 10 exf5 exf5 11 Bxc4 0-0 12 h4! (or immediately 12 Qb3, and if 12 ... Qxd4, then 13 Bxf7+ Kh7 14 Qe6 Qe3+ 15 Kf1) 12 ... gxh4 13 Qb3 etc.

10 Be3 Nbd7 11 Nxc4 0-0 12 Be2 c5 13 dxc5 Bxc5 14 Bxc5 Nxc5 15 b4! Na6 (15 ... Qxd1+ 16 Rxd1 Nxa4 17 Nxa4 b5 18 Ncb6 axb6 19 Bxb5 also favours White) **16 Qxd8 Rfxd8**



17 Na2!

‘The only way to keep the positional advantage, as 17 b5 would concede the important square c5, and 17 Rb1 would have permitted a promising counterattack starting by 17 ... Nd5!’ (Alekhine) And now 18 Na5 Rb8 19 Nxb7 is threatened. White is effectively a piece up, since the bishop at h7 is out of play. Alas, Bogoljubow again succumbs due to a badly-played opening.

17 ... Nb8! (provoking 18 b5 by the threat of ... Nc6-d4, but ...) **18 Kf2!**

The champion realises that even control of the d4-square will not ease Black’s lot.

15 ... Nc6 19 Rhd1 Nd4

According to Alekhine, 19 ... Rxd1?! 20 Rxd1 Rd8 was even worse because of 21 b5 Rxd1 22 Bxd1 Nd8 23 Nd6!, and I agree with him: 23 ... Nd7 24 Nb4 Nc5 25 a5 e5 26 a6 bxa6 27 bxa6 Kf8 28 Nb5 f5 29 exf5 Bxf5 30 Nxa7 Bd7 31 Be2 and wins.

20 Rac1 Kf8 (with the obscure prospect of ... Ne8, ... f7-f6, ... e6-e5 and ... Bg8) **21 Bf1 Ne8?!**

Too static. Bogoljubow obviously does not sense the danger and does not fully understand what is happening on the board. In my opinion, the best chance was 21 ... Nb3! 22 Rxd8+ Rxd8 23 Rc3 Nd2, trying to interfere with the opponent's plans.

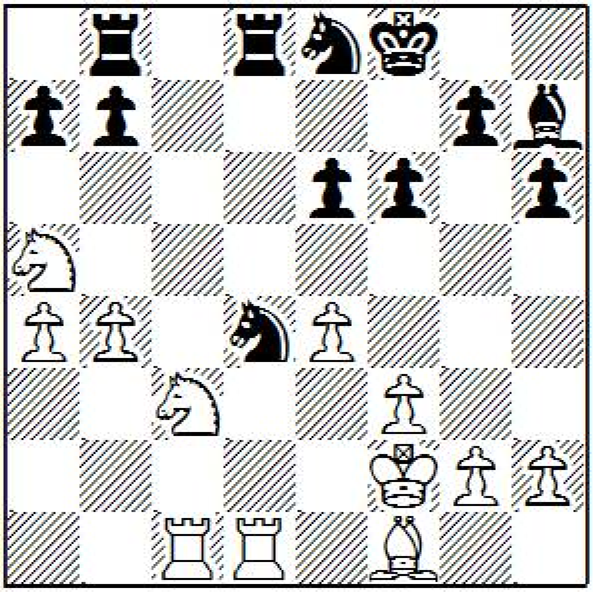
22 Nc3?!

'The immediate 22 Na5!, leaving the c-file free for the white rooks, was stronger: 22 ... b6 23 Nb7 Rd7 24 Bb5! Rxb7 25 Rxd4 Rc7 26 Rxc7 Nxc7 27 Bc6 Rc8 28 Rd7 with the threat of Bb7, or 22 ... Rab8 23 Nc3 b6 24 Rxd4! Rxd4 25 Nc6 Rbd8 26 Ke3 R4d6 27 Nxd8 Rxd8 28 Nb5! Rd7 29 Rc8 and Ra8 winning.' (Sozin) Here it is seen especially clearly what it is like for Black to play without his bishop.

22 ... f6 23 Na5 Rab8?

An oversight in an unpleasant position. 23 ... b6! was essential – according to Alekhine, after 24 Nb7 Rd7 25 Bb5 Rxb7 26 Rxd4 Rc7 27 Ne2 Rxc1 28 Nxc1 Rc8 29 Nd3 Black can fight for a draw. Sozin goes further: '29 ... e5 30 Rd7 Rc7 31 Rd8 Bg6 (*the bishop has broken free! – G. K.*) 32 Ra8 Ke7 33 Bxe8 Bxe8 34 b5! then Nb4 and Nd5 (or Nc6) with an obvious advantage to White.' However, after 34 ... Bf7 35 Nb4 Kd6 the position is equal.

But now the outcome is decided by a fine combination.



24 Nb5! Nxb5 25 Rxd8 Rxd8 26 Nxb7!

This intermediate move is the whole point. A worthy completion of White's long-term strategic plan!

26 ... Rb8

Totally bad was 26 ... Rd7 27 Nc5 or 26 ... Rd2+ 27 Ke3 Nbd6 (27 ... Rb2 28 Bxb5) 28 Kxd2 Nxb7 29 Rc8 and Ra8, picking up the a7-pawn and queening one of his pawns.

27 Nc5! (threatening both axb5 and the fork Nd7+) **27 ... Ke7 28 axb5!**

'A concrete approach to the position: the weakening of the black a7-pawn is more important than the doubling of White's own pawns.' (Kotov)

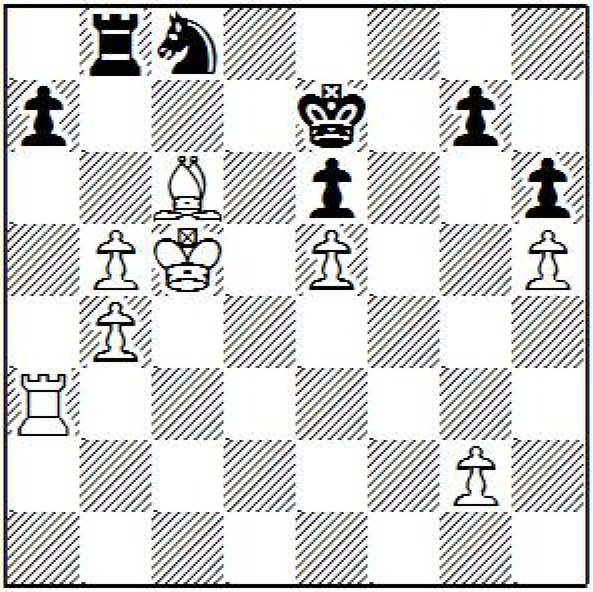
28 ... Nd6 29 Ra1 Nc8 30 Bc4 Bg8

But not 30 ... e5 31 Be6 winning. The black bishop shows signs of life, but it is too late: White is a pawn up, which he accurately converts.

31 f4 Bf7 32 e5 fxe5 33 fxe5 Rb6 34 Ke3 Be8 35 Ra5 Bd7 36 Kd4 Be8 37 h4 Bd7 38 Be2 Rb8 (38 ... Be8 39 Bf3!) **39 Nxd7 Kxd7 40 Bf3!**

But not 40 Kc5?! because of 40 ... Rb7! and ... Rc7+.

40 ... Rb6 41 Kc5 (threatening Rxa7+) **41 ... Rb8 42 h5 Kd8 43 Bc6 Ke7 44 Ra3**



44 ... Kf7

'Black is totally stalemated. After 44 ... Kd8 (44 ... Rb6 45 Rxa7+) White wins by the elegant manoeuvre 45 Rd3+ (*45 Rg3! – G. K.*) 45 ... Ke7 46 Rd7+ Kf8 47 Rd8+ Ke7 48 Rh8 Kf7 49 Bd7 Nb6 50 Rxb8 Nxd7+ 51 Kd6 Nxb8 52 Kc7.' (Sozin)

45 Be4 Ke7 46 Kc6! Kd8 47 Rd3+ Ke7 48 Kc7 1-0

Apart from the slip on the 23rd move, an excellent win by Alekhine, illustrating the difference in class of the two players.

To be fair, it should be said that this match was no easy stroll for the champion. Bogoljubow again drew level in the sixth game (2-2!), and he had the advantage in the seventh, which his opponent played too riskily, but he lost with a vexing blunder on the 20th move.

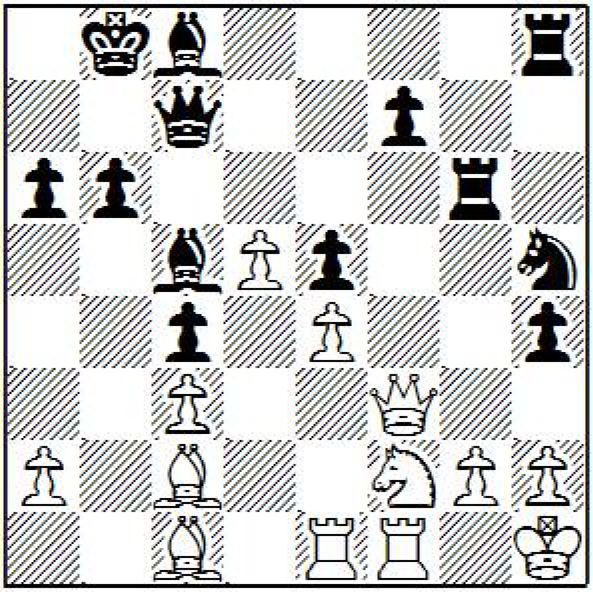
Let us look at the battle between the Russian stars through the eyes of the German master Adolf Kramer. 'Alekhine and Bogoljubow are close friends and are well familiar with each other's strong and weak sides. Bogoljubow is optimistic and sanguine. Like a massive boat he sits immobile at the board, whereas the nervy Alekhine is all the time drumming on the table with his fingers or restlessly moving his legs.' Alekhine was irritated by the sounds of music that were carrying from somewhere, and at his demand play was transferred to another room. 'Alekhine's wish is the law! ... With large, springy strides, silently, with sparkling eyes the world champion rushes among the crowd of spectators ... The corpulent Bogoljubow gets up much more rarely from his chair. His good nature does not allow him to ignore the questions of the spectators, and he hurries to hide from them in the room for journalists. On his face there is always a friendly smile ... '

How distant it still was then from the stern era of professional chess! Although crushing defeats, such as the one that occurred in the eighth game, also happen in present-day matches.

Game 133

E.Bogoljubow-A.Alekhine

Match, Germany/Holland 1929, 8th game



26 ... Ng3+! 27 hxg3 (27 Kg1 Bg4!) **27 ... hxg3+ 28 Nh3**

Or 28 Kg1 gxf2+ 29 Rxf2 Bg4 30 Qg3 Be2 etc.

28 ... Bxh3 29 gxh3 Rxh3+ 0-1

In view of 30 Kg2 Rh2 mate.

After eight games, with the score standing at 5-3 in the champion's favour, a previously envisaged two-week break(!) was announced, and Alekhine ... in his capacity as the French delegate travelled to Venice for the 6th FIDE Congress. And he returned not to Wiesbaden, but to Heidelberg, where the next three games were played. (Both previously, and later, matches for the world championship were sometimes held in several cities or even in different countries. This was very tiring for the players, but what could be done if there was no other way of raising the necessary funds?)

After a couple of draws, Alekhine won the 10th game and then also the 12th – now in Berlin (where, incidentally, the chairman of the match jury was Lasker himself!). Thus the score in wins became 6-2, and had the London rules been in operation, it would not have been necessary to travel to Holland. However, by the new rules the score was 8-4, and a further 7½ points had to be gained. A whole eternity! Bogoljubow had no intention of surrendering: to the applause of the audience he won the 13th and 14th games, while in the 15th he gained a positional advantage, drove his opponent into severe time-trouble and ... the champion nevertheless escaped with a draw.

Here is another interesting sketch from the match, this time by the master A. Seitz: ‘Alekhine is extremely nervous, even more so than usual. Already in the opening he spends a great deal of time, almost always ends up in extreme time-trouble and then constantly looks at the clock, fixing his sparkling eyes on the dial. When his opponent is thinking, he sometimes walks around the hall with long steps, and sometimes stops in front of the demonstration board and looks at it attentively, as though hoping to notice something new ... Alekhine gave up smoking a long time ago (and therefore he feels much better), but Bogoljubow constantly smokes thick “Havanas” or cheap Swiss cigars.’

At the crucial moment the champion was able to gain a grip on the match and confidently move towards victory, by winning a further five games – two in Berlin and three in Holland. At the end the circle was closed: the last two drawn games, the 24th and 25th, were again played in Wiesbaden.

Of course, in this duel between two striking, but *unequal* opponents there were far more mistakes and omissions than in Buenos Aires. However, Nikolai Grigoriev was right when he said: ‘The match vividly demonstrated how great can be a person’s creative inventiveness in chess, and what an inexhaustible wealth of combinative possibilities it contains – and it put a stop to the unnecessary and harmful stories about the drawing death of chess.’

In an interview after the match Bogoljubow stated: ‘No one now has any chances of defeating Alekhine in a match. Nimzowitsch has none at all. And I wouldn’t advise Capablanca to play a return match, since after this new encounter his halo will completely fade. True, I think that Capablanca is stronger than many others ... ’ To a question of whether Alekhine could calmly rest on his laurels, Bogoljubow replied: ‘Capablanca tried to rest on his laurels. But Alekhine will defeat everyone who he meets. During the next four to five years I will follow his victories, and then we will play again. I do not agree to consider myself completely defeated after this first loss.’

But what was Capablanca doing during this match? He played successfully in two unimportant tournaments – in Budapest and then in Barcelona ... Let us return to our diary.

1 October 1929. On the eve of the ninth game the following letter was sent from Barcelona to Heidelberg: ‘Capablanca – to Alekhine. Dear Sir! I confirm my previous challenge to a match for the world championship. In accordance with the London rules of 1922 I have transferred a deposit of $500 to Dr Lederer.’

28 November 1929. Alekhine sends a reply from Paris to Capablanca, confirming the receipt of the challenge ... On 14 November in Wiesbaden (i.e. immediately after the match with Bogoljubow: obviously, before the end of it the champion did not have the right to consider any new challenges): ‘I accept your challenge and set the start of the match between 15 October and 15 December 1930.’

3 December 1929. Capablanca replies instantly to Alekhine: ‘I am sending a copy of your letter in order to find out from Dr Lederer if the arrangements can be carried out on the days you mention. As soon as I have an answer about it, from Dr Lederer, I shall, I hope, be able to give you a definite answer as to a place for the match, etc.’

December 1929. Reports appear in the press that it is planned to stage the return match in the small American resort of Bradley Beach or in Mexico. Alekhine makes an announcement that until the end of 1930 he will consider himself morally obliged to play Capablanca, but if the latter does not find the required funds, then he, Alekhine, will be able to accept other challenges.

January 1930. Capablanca wins the tournament in Hastings, but the press reports that his match with Alekhine is being deferred due to financial difficulties. Indeed: the crash on the New York stock exchange, the world economic crisis ... This means, he was out of luck.

1 June 1930. Capablanca sends a letter to Alekhine with a request to defer the start of the match to the winter (1930/31) and Alekhine agrees to grant a postponement to 14 February 1931.

June-July 1930. In reply Capablanca states that he made a slip of the pen and he requests a postponement to the winter of 1931/32. At the same time he accuses Alekhine of greatly dragging out the question of the return match. After this there follows an exchange of attacks and reproaches.

13-27 July 1930. Alekhine plays for the French team in the Olympiad in Hamburg and scores 9 out of 9 (incidentally, the Poles won there with Rubinstein on top board – 15 out of 17, Akiba’s swansong!). Capablanca is present at the Olympiad as a spectator. He attentively follows the play, but does everything possible to avoid Alekhine ...

‘The two great players became enemies and never again spoke to each other,’ is how things were summed up by grandmaster Yuri Averbakh, who absorbingly described this story in an article in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (1989 No.11) and in his book *V poiskakh istiny* (In Search of the Truth) (1992).

Let us see what the ranking order in the world chess arena was at the start of 1930. In the absence of ratings, a more or less reliable picture is given by the result of a poll, conducted by the French sports magazine *Loto* among chess journalists in Europe and America (a prototype of the ‘Chess Oscar’!): 1. Alekhine – 870 points; 2. Capablanca – 809; 3. Lasker – 729; 4. Nimzowitsch – 686.5; 5. Bogoljubow – 651.6; 6. Spielmann – 424.7; 7. Rubinstein – 385.8; 8. Vidmar – 378.9; 9. Euwe – 370.1; 10. Tartakower – 297.

What is striking is the large gap between the top five and the next five. In view of the fact that Capa and Nimzowitsch did not have the funds for a match for the crown, Lasker now hardly ever played, Rubinstein had finished his career and Euwe had not yet developed, the only ‘real’ challenger remained the indefatigable Bogoljubow. Even despite a decline in his results and his loss in a match against Spielmann by 4-5 (Semmering 1932). In the spring of 1934 Bogoljubow raised the necessary minimum prize fund in Germany, and his prediction of a second match with Alekhine was realised. An amusing detail: on the challenger’s insistence this was called a ‘revenge match’ – such a thing would not have occurred to Chigorin in 1892 or to Spassky in 1969 ...

During the intervening four years Alekhine had gained a series of brilliant tournament victories (which will be described later) and under their influence his style had become even more risky and reckless. He had acquired the dangerous feeling that anything was permitted: it was said that he was a daredevil, who could confuse anyone he wanted and who could win any position! And his second match with Bogoljubow, outwardly more successful than the first (the challenger was no longer the same player) is noteworthy in this respect.

The conditions were the same as those previously: the best of 30 games, and the winner to win at least six games. Alekhine again won ahead of schedule: 15½-10½ (+8 -3 =15). He moved towards his goal like Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Terminator*, sweeping away everything in his path, but from time to time his ‘computer system’ malfunctioned and went awry ... I will give only a couple of examples.

After beginning the match quite well – draw, win, draw, the champion suddenly played shockingly in the opening of the fourth game. He wanted to avoid the ‘Meran’, then still a new, little-studied system, devised by Rubinstein in the 1920s.

Game 134

A.Alekhine-E.Bogoljubow

World Championship Match, Germany 1934, 4th game

Slav Defence D31

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3

In both matches Alekhine also tried 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3 e6 5 Bd3 Nbd7 6 Nbd2, but without particular success.

3 ... Nf6 4 e3 e6 5 Bd3 Nbd7 6 f4?!

An artificial move in the hope of setting up a bind. The normal 6 Nf3 would have repeated the second game, which went 6 ... dxc4 7 Bxc4 b5 8 Bd3 a6 9 0-0 (9 e4) 9 ... c5 10 a4!? b4 11 Ne4 Bb7 12 Ned2 Be7 13 a5 0-0 14 Nc4 Qc7 15 Qe2 Ng4 (15 ... cxd4! Lasker) 16 e4! cxd4 17 h3 Nge5?! (17 ... Ngf6) 18 Nfxe5 Nxe5 19 Bf4! Bd6 20 Bxe5! Bxe5 21 Nb6! Ra7?! 22 Rac1 Qd6 23 Rc4 f5? 24 exf5 exf5 25 Re1! and White won.

6 ... dxc4! (of course, not 6 ... Bd6? 7 c5 Bc7 8 b4) **7 Bxc4 b5 8 Bd3 Bb7 9 Nf3**

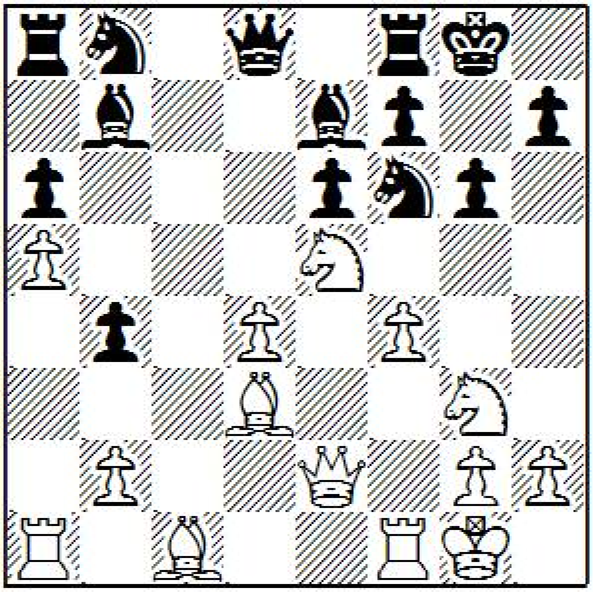
A ‘Meran’ has been reached with the unnecessary weakening move f2-f4. 9 e4? b4 10 Nce2 c5! would be altogether tedious.

9 ... a6 10 a4 (the immediate 10 0-0 c5 11 f5 was more logical) **10 ... b4 11 Ne2** (or 11 Ne4 c5!) **11 ... c5! 12 0-0 Be7** (12 ... g6!? and ... Bg7) **13 a5?!**

Again a dubious move. 13 f5 exf5 14 Bxf5 0-0 15 Ng3 would have led to complicated play.

13 ... 0-0 14 Ng3 g6 15 Qe2 cxd4 16 exd4 (16 Nxd4 Nc5 17 Bc4 Nfe4 is also unattractive) **16 ... Nb8! 17 Ne5!?**

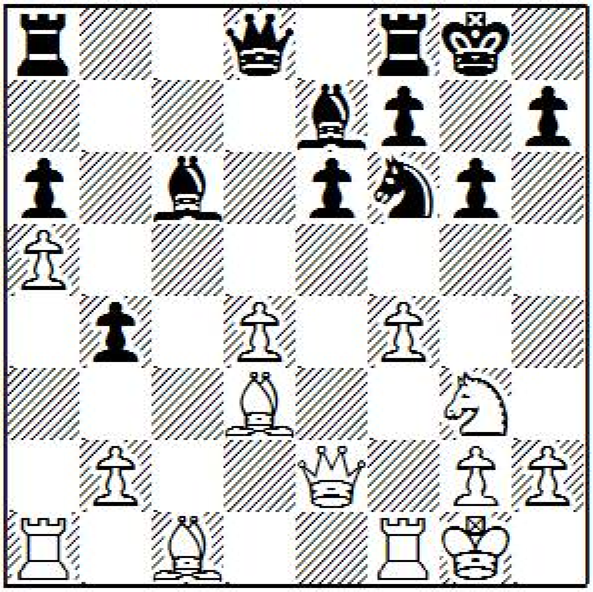
Desperation: if 17 f5, then 17 ... Bxf3! 18 Qxf3 Qxd4+ 19 Kh1 Nbd7 and ... Ne5.



17 ... Nc6

Black could have considered the fearless 17 ... Qxd4+!? 18 Be3 Qd8 (18 ... Qd6 19 Nc4!?) 19 Rfd1 Nd5 with hopes of converting his material advantage.

18 Nxc6 Bxc6

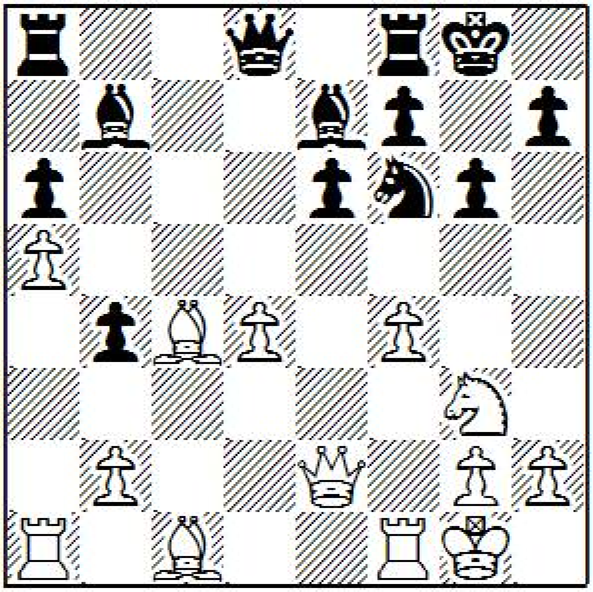


19 Bc4?

Essential was 19 Bxa6 Ng4! (19 ... Rxa6 20 Qxa6 Qxd4+ 21 Kh1 Qd5 22 Qe2 Bb5 23 Qf3 Bxf1 24 Qxd5 Nxd5 25 Nxf1 Bc5 is level) 20 Qxg4 (20 Rd1 Bf6! with the initiative) 20 ... Qxd4+ (20 ... Rxa6 21 f5! Alekhine) 21 Kh1 Rxa6 22 Qe2 Qa7 23 Be3 Qb7 24 Bb6 Bd8 and Black's advantage is comparatively slight.

19 ... Bb7

Now White has a difficult, strategically almost hopeless position. It is another matter that Alekhine begins somehow to defend himself and to wriggle, Bogoljubow is unable to find a forced win, and time-trouble interferes.

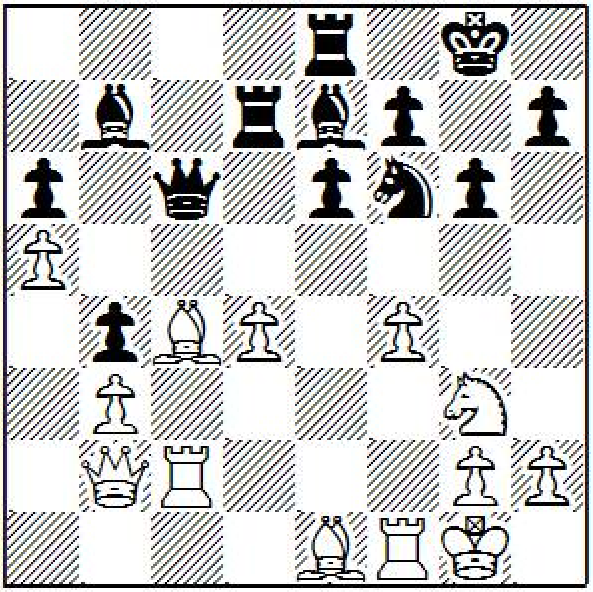


20 Be3 Qd6 (20 ... Nd5!?) **21 Rad1 Rfe8 22 b3 Bf8** (22 ... Bd8!?) **23 Rd3 Qc7!? 24 Qa2 Bd6 25 Bd2**

After 25 f5 a good reply is 25 ... Bxg3! 26 fxe6 Bxh2+ 27 Kh1 fxe6 28 Rxf6 Bd5 etc.

25 ... Qc6! 26 Be1 Rad8 27 Rd2 Be7 (27 ... Bb8!? intending ... Ba7) **28 Qb2 Rd7 29 Rc2?**

A time-trouble error in a difficult position.



29 ... Qd6?

Returning the compliment. After 29 ... Ng4! (but not 29 ... Rxd4 30 Bxa6!) Black would have won after any reply: 30 Re2 Bf6; 30 Qc1 Rxd4; 30 d5 Bc5+ 31 Kh1 exd5; 30 Bd3 Qd6 31 Rc4 Ne3 32 Bxb4 Nxc4; 30 Rf3 Bf6 31 Rd2 (31 Rd3 or 31 Bd3 – 31 ... Qd6) 31 ... Qc7; or 30 f5 Ne3 31 fxe6 fxe6 32 Re2 Nxc4.

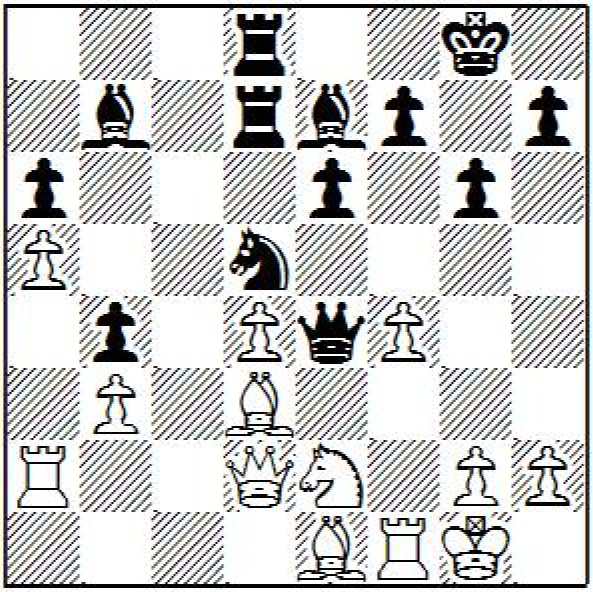
30 Ne2 Nd5 (30 ... Qc6! 31 Ng3 Ng4 was stronger) **31 Qc1 Bd8 32 Bg3 Qe7**

Ah, time-trouble! Better was 32 ... f5 or 32 ... Qc6! (but not 32 ... Bxa5 33 f5!).

33 Ra2 Qf6 34 Qd2 Qf5

After 34 ... Nc3 35 Nxc3 Rxd4 there could have followed 36 Ne4 (36 Qc1?! bxc3 37 Qxc3) 36 ... Bxe4 37 Qxb4.

35 Bd3 Qf6 36 Bc4 Be7 37 Qd3 Red8 38 Be1 Qf5 39 Qd2 Qe4?! (after 39 ... Qf6 things would still have been difficult for White) **40 Bd3**



40 ... Qe3+

With the last move before the time control Bogoljubow goes in for the exchange of queens, slightly easing his opponent's thankless defence.

41 Bf2 (here the game was adjourned) **41 ... Qxd2 42 Rxd2 Rc8 43 Bc4 Kg7 44 g3 Rcd8 45 Rc1 h6** (good was 45 ... Nc3 or 45 ... Nf6 with the idea of ... Ng4xf2) **46 Bd3 f5**

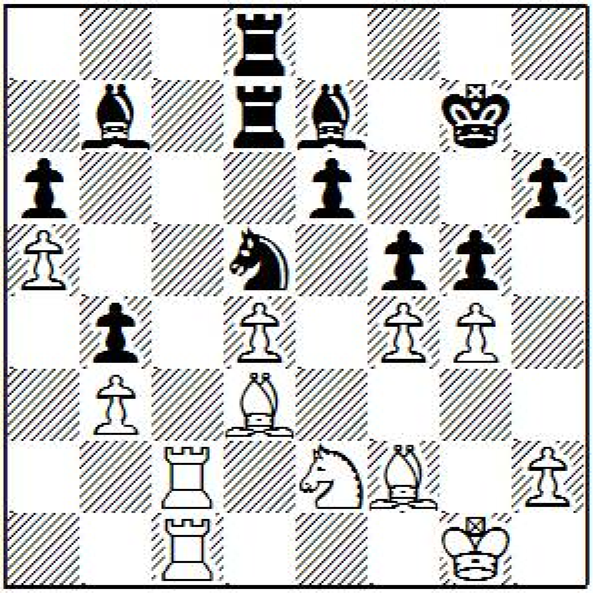
Again strong was 46 ... Nf6!? 47 Rdd1 Ng4 48 Be1 Ne3 49 Rd2 Nf5! with an obvious advantage.

47 Rdc2 g5!?

47 ... Kf7 was much quieter. But Black begins playing 'for a win' at the most inappropriate moment. And yet this move, which was condemned by everyone, is in my view not so bad.

48 g4!!

An unexpected, splendid resource – this is pure Alekhine!



48 ... Nxf4?

And immediately comes a ridiculous mistake. ‘This exchange of his best-posted piece against the cripple at e2 definitely spoils Black’s position.’ (Alekhine) He had three acceptable replies:

1) 48 ... fxg4 – this would seem to be dangerous on account of 49 f5! Kf6! (49 ... exf5? 50 Bxf5 Rd6 51 Bg3 Ne3 52 Rc7; 49 ... Nf4? 50 Nxf4 gxf4 51 fxe6; 49 ... e5? 50 dxe5 are all winning for White) 50 fxe6 Kxe6 (50 ... Rd6?! 51 Ng3 Rxe6 52 Nh5+ Kf7 53 Bf5 Red6 54 Bg3) 51 Ng3 Rf8?! 52 Re1+ Kf7 53 Bf5 with an attack, but stronger is 51 ... Kf7! 52 Bf5 Nc3 with sharp play;

2) 48 ... gxf4 49 gxf5 Kf7 (49 ... exf5 50 Bxf5 Rd6 51 Rc7 Kf6 52 Bg4 is unclear) 50 fxe6+ Kxe6 51 Re1 Kf7 with some advantage to Black;

3) 48 ... Rf8! – this move, found by me, is not mentioned by any of the commentators, although here White still has a difficult position, for example: 49 gxf5 exf5 50 Ng3 Kg6 51 fxg5 hxg5 followed by ... Bd6, ... Nf4 etc.

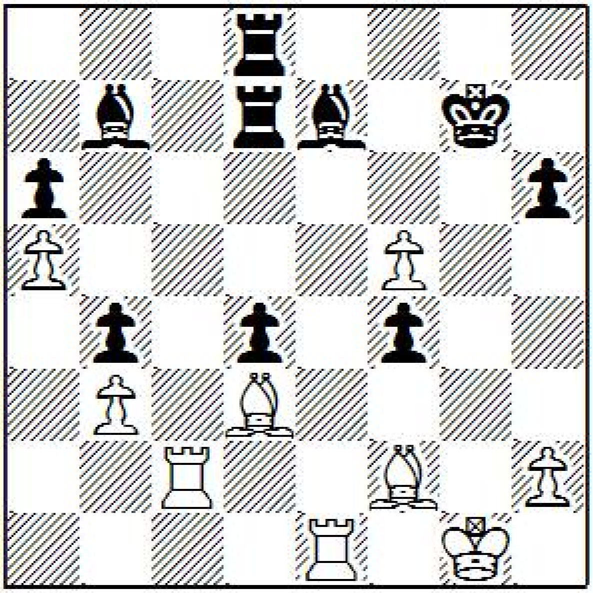
49 Nxf4 gxf4 50 gxf5 e5

Also dismal is 50 ... exf5 51 Bxf5 Rd5 52 Rc7 Kf8 (even worse is 52 ... Rxf5 53 Rxe7+ Rf7 54 Rxf7+ Kxf7 55 Rc7+, 52 ... Kf6 53 Rxb7 Rxf5 54 Bh4+, or 52 ... Ba8 53 Rxe7+ Kf6 54 Re6+ Kxf5 55 Rxa6) 53 Rxb7 Rxf5 54 Rcc7 Re8 (54 ... Bd6 55 Rh7!) 55 Rc6 Rxa5 56 Rxh6.

51 Re1! exd4?

Bogoljubow ‘drifts’, overlooking his opponent’s fine reply. Also bad is 51 ... Rc8? 52 Rxc8 Bxc8 53 Bc4! exd4? 54 Rxe7+! Rxe7 55 f6+ or 51 ... Rd5? 52 Be4 R5d7 53 Bxb7 Rxb7 54 dxe5 winning.

However, after 51 ... Bf6! Black could still have held on: after the ‘winning’ 52 Rc4, in my opinion, 52 ... Rg8! is totally unclear, while in the event of 52 dxe5 he is saved by an exchange sacrifice – 52 ... Rxd3! (not 52 ... Bxe5? 53 Rxe5 Rxd3 54 Re7+) 53 exf6+ Kxf6 54 Bh4+ Kxf5 55 Bxd8 Rxd8 with a probable draw.



52 Rxe7+!!

Spectacular! ‘Alekhine does not miss such opportunities.’ (Lasker) 52 Bxd4+?! Rxd4 53 Rxe7+ Kf8 54 Rxb7 Rxd3 55 Rcc7 was incorrect in view of 55 ... Re3! equalising.

52 ... Rxe7 53 Bh4 Kf7 (53 ... Red7 54 Bxd8 Rxd8 55 Rc7+; 53 ... Re3 54 Rc7+) **54 Bxe7 Kxe7 55 Rc7+ Rd7 56 f6+ Ke8** (56 ... Kd6 57 f7; 56 ... Ke6 57 Bf5+) **57 Bg6+!** (57 f7+ Rxf7 58 Bg6 Bd5 was inaccurate) **57 ... Kd8 58 f7 Kxc7 59 f8Q f3 60 Qxb4 Rd6 61 Bd3 1-0**

In what way is this game significant? Alekhine played the opening sloppily, ended up in a bad position, held on only thanks to enormous effort and resourcefulness, and barely had a direct clash with the hostile army begun, when he landed a couple of tactical blows – and the opponent immediately collapsed! Did this mean that he could win as he pleased?!

Bogoljubow was no longer capable of punishing his opponent for such audacious play, especially since Alekhine also gained some clean wins. After the 17th game the match reached the 'London standard' – 6-1 (with 10 draws) in the champion's favour, but by the rules in force he still needed a further 4½ points. Which he gained in the following nine games ... but in what style!

Game 135

E.Bogoljubow-A.Alekhine

World Championship Match, Germany 1934, 21st game

Queen's Gambit D30

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 e6 3 c4 a6?!

The defence named after Janowski, who played this back in London 1899 against Steinitz, Lasker and Pillsbury. Black's plan is in the event of 4 e3, avoiding 'superfluous' variations, to transpose into the Queen's Gambit Accepted: 4 ... dxc4 5 Bxc4 b5 6 Bd3 Bb7 followed by ... c7-c5.

4 c5

4 cxd5 exd5 5 Nc3 is more usual, but this position had been successfully defended by Rubinstein – against Bogoljubow (Sweden 1st matchgame 1920), Johner (Teplitz-Schonau 1922), Alekhine (Baden-Baden 1925) and Grünfeld (Marienbad 1925).

4 ... b6!

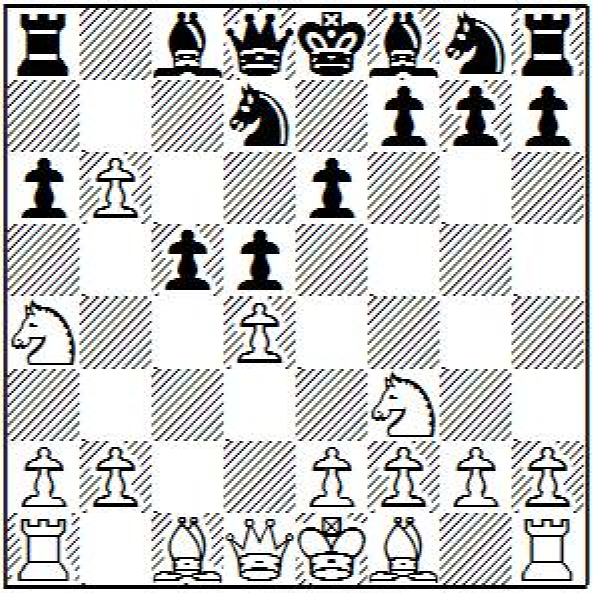
A recommendation of Tarrasch. The well-known game Alekhine-Rubinstein (The Hague 1921) went 4 ... Nc6?! 5 Bf4 Nge7 6 Nc3 Ng6 7 Be3! b6 8 cxb6 cxb6 9 h4! Bd6 10 h5 Nge7 11 h6! g6 12 Bg5 0-0 13 Bf6! and White gained a memorable victory.

5 cxb6 c5!?

Continuing to experiment. The modest 5 ... cxb6 leads to a somewhat inferior position.

6 Nc3 Nd7 7 Na4

Playing to hold the pawn, but it is also logical to play for rapid development – 7 e4!?



7 ... c4?

Again a *lapsus* in the opening! 7 ... cxd4! would have led to a good game, for example: 8 Qxd4 Ne7! (8 ... Bb7 9 Bf4!) 9 e4 Nc6 10 Qe3 Nb4! 11 Bd3 Nc5!, or 8 Qb3 Bb7 9 Bf4 (9 Nxd4 Nc5 10 Qd1 Qd7! 11 Nc3 Qd6) 9 ... Nc5! 10 Nxc5 (10 Qd1 Qd7!) 10 ... Bxc5 11 Bc7 (11 Be5 Nf6 12 Bxd4 Bxd4 13 Nxd4 0-0 14 e3 Nd7 is level) 11 ... Qe7 12 Qa4+ Kf8 13 a3 Nf6 14 Qa5 Rc8 etc.

8 Bd2 Bd6 (if 8 ... Ngf6, then 9 Ba5 and 10 e3) **9 b3 Bb7**

Alas, 9 ... Nxb6 will not do in view of 10 Nxb6 (10 Ba5 Bc7!, but not 10 ... Nxa4? 11 Bxd8 Bb4+ 12 Nd2 c3 13 Bg5) 10 ... Qxb6 11 bxc4 dxc4 12 e3 and wins.

10 e3 cxb3 (10 ... Rc8 11 Rc1 Ba3 12 Rc3 Bb4 13 Rc2 would also not have solved Black’s problems) **11 Qxb3**

Already by the 11th move Black is in a terrible position – one simply wants to resign for him: White has an extra passed pawn at b6!

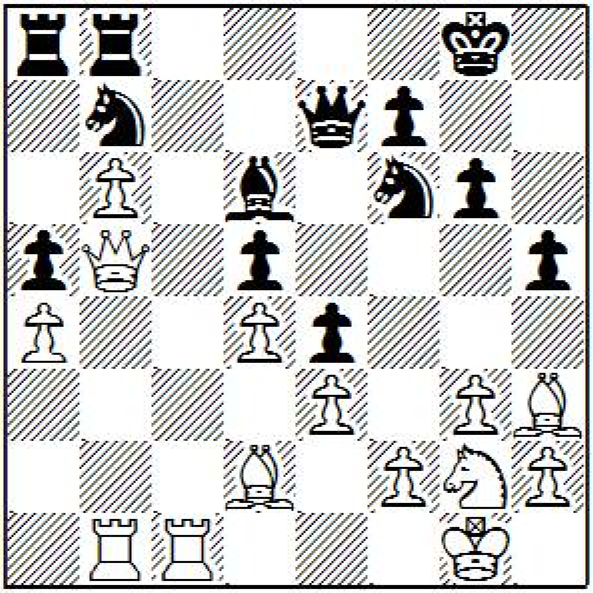
11 ... Ne7 12 Bd3 0-0 13 0-0 Nc6 14 Rfc1 e5 15 Bf5

15 dxe5 Ndxe5 16 Be2 is also possible, only not 15 Qxd5? Nf6 16 Qb3 e4.

15 ... e4 16 Ne1 Nf6 17 Nc5 Qe7 18 g3 Rfb8 19 a4 a5 20 Qb5 Nd8 21 Nxb7 (21 Bxa5? is a mistake because of 21..Bc6 22 Qb4 Nb7) **21 ... Nxb7 22 Rab1 h5**

Alekhine plays as though nothing has happened, and finds some chances! However, for the moment Black's position does not improve.

23 Ng2 (23 h4!?) **23 ... g6 24 Bh3**



24 ... g5! (unexpectedly beginning to pursue the bishop) **25 Bf5 Qd8! 26 Rc6 Be7** (threatening ... Nd6) **27 h4!**

Bogoljubow is also resourceful!

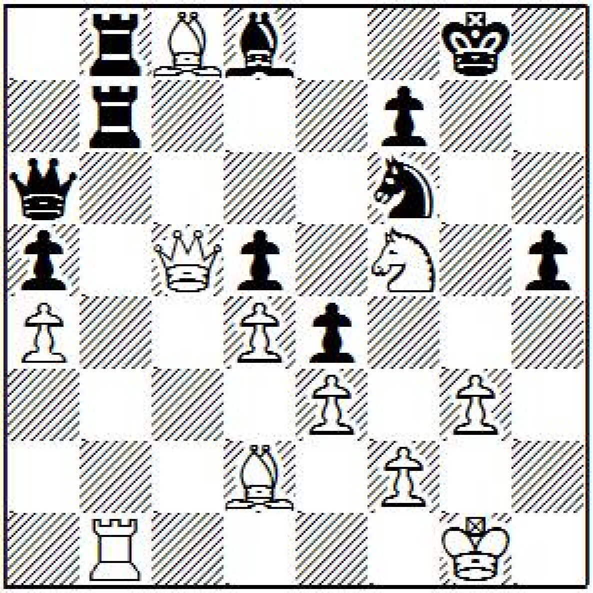
27 ... gxh4

If 27 ... Nd6, then 28 Rxd6! Qxd6 29 hxg5, while 27 ... g4 is met by the decisive 28 Rxf6! (this is more energetic than 28 Nf4 Nd6 29 Rxd6 Qxd6 30 Bxa5 Bd8 31 Rc1 Qa3 32 Rc6 Qa1+ 33 Kg2) 28 ... Bxf6 29 Nf4, picking up virtually all the pawns.

28 Nxh4 Nd6 29 Rxd6

Bogoljubow attaches an exclamation mark to this move, although he could also have won by 29 Qe2 Nc4 (29 ... Qe8! 30 Rbc1 Qd8 is somewhat more tenacious) 30 b7 (30 Rb5!?) 30 ... Nd6 (30 ... Ra7? 31 Rc8) 31 Bc8 Ra7 32 Nf5.

29 ... Qxd6 30 b7 (30 Bxa5 Bd8!) **30 ... Ra7 31 Bc8 Bd8 32 Nf5 Qa6 33 Qc5** (the line 33 Bc1 Qxb5 34 Rxb5 Ra6 35 Ba3 Rc6 36 Be7! was a simpler way to win the game) **33 ... Raxb7**



34 Rb5??

I really don’t know what White was thinking of. He could have won by 34 Rxb7 (34 Kg2!?) 34 ... Rxb7 35 Bxb7 Qxb7 36 Bxa5 (also good is 36 Qd6!? Qc8 37 Bxa5 or 36 ... Qa8 37 Qf4 Ng4 38 Nd6) 36 ... Qb1+ 37 Kg2 Qd1! 38 Nh6+ Kh7 39 Bxd8 Qf3+ 40 Kg1 Qd1+ 41 Kh2 Qe2 42 Qf8! Qxf2+ 43 Kh3, or 38 Nh4!? Ng4 39 Bb4! Kh7 (39 ... Nxe3+ 40 fxe3 Qe2+ 41 Kg1! Qxe3+ 42 Kh2 Bxh4 43 Qf8+) 40 Qxd5 Nxe3+ 41 fxe3 Qe2+ 42 Kh3 Qg4+ 43 Kh2 (Bogoljubow).

34 ... Rxb5 35 Bxa6 Rxc5 36 dxc5 Nd7

As a result of White’s blunder Black is simply the exchange up. But the subsequent play in time-trouble is exciting: it is now Alekhine who throws away the win ...

37 c6 Ne5 (with ideas of ... Nf3+ and ... Nxc6) **38 Nd4 Rb2** (inferior is 38 ... Nf3+? 39 Nxf3 exf3 40 Bb5 Bc7 41 Bc3) **39 Bc3 Rb1+ 40 Kg2 Bb6?**

With the last move before the time control Black loses almost all of his enormous advantage. 40 ... Nf3! 41 Nb5 Rc1 42 Bb7 Kh7! 43 c7 Bxc7 44 Bxd5 f5 would have been decisive.

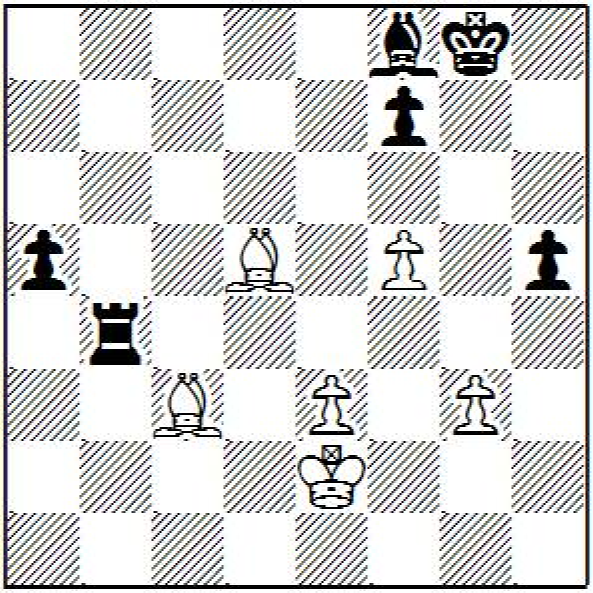
41 Bb7 Nf3! 42 Nxf3

The complicated variations after 42 Nf5!? would most probably have led to a draw: 42 ... Kf8 43 Bg7+ Ke8 44 Nd6+ (44 Bf6!? Lasker) 44 ... Kd8 (or 44 ... Ke7 45 Nc8+ Kd8 46 Nxb6 Rxb6 47 Bc3! Rb4 48 Bxb4 axb4 49 c7+ Kxc7 50 Bxd5) 45 Bf6+ Kc7 46 Nb5+ Kb8 47 Be7 Bc7 48 Bc5 Rg1+ 49 Kh3 Rh1+ 50 Kg2 with equality.

42 ... exf3+ 43 Kxf3 Bc7 44 Ba6?

Why give up the pawn? After 44 Ke2! (with the idea of Ba6-b5) 44 ... Rb3 45 Bd4 Ra3 there is counterplay with 46 f4! Rxa4 47 Ba6! Ra2+ (47 ... Rb4 48 Be5) 48 Kd1! a4 (48 ... Kf8 49 Be5 Bb6 50 c7 Bxc7 51 Bxc7) 49 Be5 Bb6 50 Bd4 Bd8 51 Bf6! equalising (Bogoljubow).

44 ... Rc1 45 Bd4 Rxc6 46 Bb7 Rc4 47 Bxd5 Rxa4 (now Black has a technically won position) **48 Ke2 Bd6 49 f4 Bf8 50 f5 Rb4 51 Bc3**



51 ... Rg4?

Even at the end Alekhine’s play shows a lack of accuracy and he makes a serious mistake, allowing the exchange of his outside passed pawn for the weak g3-pawn. After 51 ... Rb5! the a-pawn would have swiftly advanced.

52 Be5?

Much better drawing chances were offered by 52 Bxa5! Rxg3 53 Bc7 Rg5 54 e4 and 55 Kf3, when it is still possible somehow to combat the h-pawn.

52 ... a4 (now this infantryman cannot be stopped) **53 e4 h4 54 Kf3 h3! 55 Bf4 Rg7 56 g4** (or 56 e5 Rh7 57 e6 Bc5! 58 exf7+ Kf8 winning) **56 ... Rh7 57 Bh2 Bd6! 58 Bxd6 h2 59 Bxh2 Rxh2 60 e5 a3 61 e6 fxe6 62 Bxe6+ Kf8 63 Kf4 a2 0-1**

Alekhine won the match comparatively easily, but wins such as those in the fourth and 21st games did him a bad service: he became convinced of his own superiority and complete impunity! And in the 1935 match with Euwe there was to be unexpected retribution ...

It is a pity that the world did not in fact see an Alekhine-Capablanca return match. Bogoljubow was undoubtedly a more convenient opponent for the champion. Just as Marshall and Janowski were for Lasker, or, say, Larsen was for Spassky or Fischer. Just as Korchnoi would have been for Karpov, if the intrigue regarding my disqualification in the summer of 1983 had succeeded. Just as Shirov would have been for me in the autumn of 1998 or 2000, and whom Kramnik would have liked to succeed in the qualifying tournament at Dortmund 2002.

The Champion’s Golden Era

It has to be said that, apart from anything, Alekhine was the most outstanding chess author and analyst of his time. His tournament books of New York (1924 and 1927) and Nottingham (1936), his books of best games and his *On the Road to the World Championship* became classic examples of the art of annotation. But, in my opinion, especially interesting are his controversial articles about the development of chess thinking.

For example, in his reports for the *New York Times* from Carlsbad 1929 the world champion divided the participants into two main groups, ‘neo-romanticists’ (for which read ‘hypermodernists’) and ‘reformists’, predicting that the tournament

‘ ... promises to develop into a determined battle between the adherents of two schools opposed in their fundamental interpretation of the essence of chess. One group is represented by the former world’s champion, José Capablanca of Cuba, who in addition to being a devotee of sixty-four squares is also fond of tennis and other physical sports. With him are two engineers, Geza Maróczy of Hungary and Dr M. Vidmar of Yugoslavia; the mathematician, Dr Max Euwe of Holland, and that well-known explorer of chess variations E. Grünfeld of Vienna.

For them the “what” of chess is more important than the “how”. Victory to them is the sole aim of the game. Only in rare instances, when their creative instinct masters their sporting will, do they become interested in the “quality”, and it then asserts itself in the practical application of scientific chess experience.

The outcome of the rejection of the creative aspects of chess could easily be foreseen. It resulted in the school of reformists, led by Capablanca, who feared that theory, highly developed, might result in a paralysis of the game and they therefore sought to revivify it through propagating a revision of the rules of play. Now, just what does this postulation mean?

First, an overestimation of the force of theory in a utilitarian sense.

Second, a disregard for the intuitive – the imaginative – and all those other elements which raise chess to the level of an art.

Third, it results in a general ‘shallowing’ of the creative performance.

To just such a deadening level the reformist school, these pseudo-scientists, would reduce the noble game of chess, but fortunately there prevails a stronger oppositional force which first asserted itself in the play of Breyer and Réti, whose premature deaths were a distinct loss to the chess world. As representatives in the present Carlsbad tournament of their interpretation we name E.D. Bogoljubow of Russia, A. Nimzowitsch of Denmark, Dr S. Tartakower of France, E. Canal of Peru, F. Sämisch of Germany and E. Colle of Belgium.

These masters have succeeded in demonstrating that even in the realm of the newest theoretical accomplishments there still remains plenty of scope for the development of the imagination, temperament and will-power. To their achievements the game of chess, since the War, owes its unexpected advance.

One could fitly designate this group as the “neo-romanticists”, and they have been referred to as such, but they might also justly be called the “tragedians of chess” because, while the reformist will greet the mistakes of his opponent in a utilitarian sense, the neo-romanticist desires to carry his grand scheme to completion.

Right here enters that moment when the art of chess may be called the most tragic of all arts, because the chess artist, in a measure, is dependent on an element outside the scope of his power; that element is the hostile co-workers who through carelessness constantly threaten to wreck a flawless mental edifice. The chess player who aspires to demonstrate the “how” of the game will view the single point scored a poor offset for the failure to gratify his artistic yearnings.

His bent for creating often results in disappointments, but in the end the passion is victorious, and it is only due to the sacrificing powers of many enlightened chess talents, because their creative leanings have foregone professional careers, that the chess world will be freed of the superstition of the reformists. Chess is not football.

Between the two groups of contenders for prize money in the Carlsbad tournament we also would mention the so-called “classicists”, primarily Akiba Rubinstein of Poland, then that apostle of the king’s pawn, Rudolph Spielmann of Austria, and last, but not least, the gifted but erratic American champion, Frank Marshall.’

Despite his emigration, Alekhine also published articles in the Soviet magazine *Shakhmaty*, edited by Nikolai Grekov. But at the end of 1929, after his match with Bogoljubow, this magazine closed. As Krylenko explained, ‘we are not taking measures to retain *Shakhmaty*, for the reason that it is an apolitical magazine which has not included political articles, and for the reason that one of its constant contributors has been Alekhine.’

After winning his matches against Capablanca and Bogoljubow, the champion also shone in the tournament arena. Early in 1930 he played in a strong tournament in the Italian resort of San Remo, after agreeing for himself a fee of 20,000 lira (or in the event of Capablanca participating – 40,000 lira; the Cuban, of course, was not invited). The result exceeded all expectations and the ancient records of Lasker in London 1899 and Paris 1900: 1. Alekhine – 14 out of 15 (only two draws!); 2. Nimzowitsch – 10½; 3. Rubinstein – 10; 4. Bogoljubow – 9½; 5. Yates – 9; 6. Ahues – 8½; 7-8. Vidmar and Spielmann – 8; 9-10. Maróczy and Tartakower – 7½ etc.

Of his games in San Remo I would single out his win over Vidmar, who was literally torn apart by the Alekhine cavalry and then finished off in a classic ending with knight and three pawns against rook and two (I had a similar ending with Kramnik in the second game of the Botvinnik Memorial, Moscow 2001), and also this impressive, crushing win against the ambitious second prize-winner – Nimzowitsch.

Game 136

A.Alekhine-A.Nimzowitsch

San Remo 1930

French Defence C17

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 Bd2 (Bogoljubow's move; 5 a3! is undoubtedly more active) **5 ... Ne7 6 Nb5**

Or 6 a3 Bxc3 7 Bxc3 Nbc6 (7 ... b6) 8 Nf3 cxd4 9 Bxd4 Nf5 equalising.

6 ... Bxd2+ 7 Qxd2 0-0 8 c3

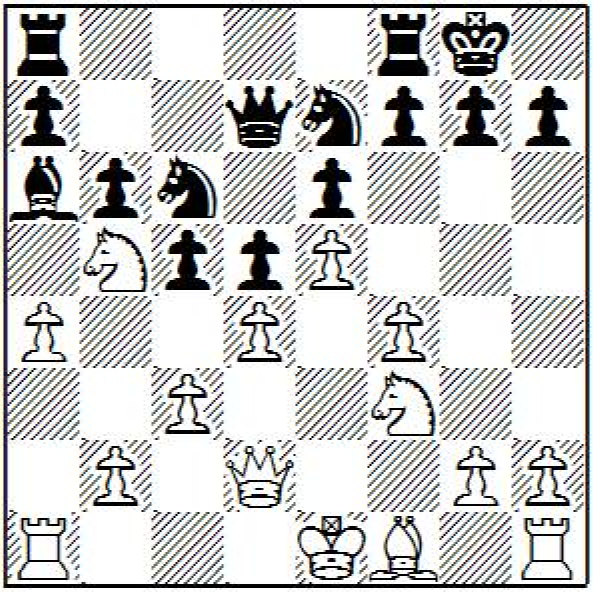
If 8 Nf3, then 8 ... cxd4. More lively is 8 dxc5!? Nbc6 (8 ... Nd7!) 9 Nf3 b6!? 10 cxb6 Qxb6 11 0-0-0! Rb8 12 b3 Qc5 13 Nbd4 a5 14 Kb1 a4 15 Bd3 h6 with sharp play (Spassky-Bronstein, 24th USSR Championship, Moscow 1957).

8 ... b6?!

'A groundless attempt: Black does not succeed in exchanging his c8-bishop. Good – and natural enough – was 8 ... Nf5! (preventing Nd6), as played with success by the same Nimzowitsch against Dr Lasker in Zürich, 1934.' (Alekhine) That game went 9 g4?! Nh4! etc. Or 9 Bd3 Bd7 10 Nf3 Bxb5 11 Bxb5 Qb6 12 Bd3 Nc6 with equality (Stoltz-Nimzowitsch, Stockholm match 1934). 8 ... f6!? is also adequate.

9 f4 Ba6 10 Nf3 Qd7 11 a4! Nbc6

In the event of 11 ... c4?! 12 Nd6 Nc8 (or 12 ... f6 13 Be2) 13 Nxc8 Rxc8 14 Be2 Black has a bad French.



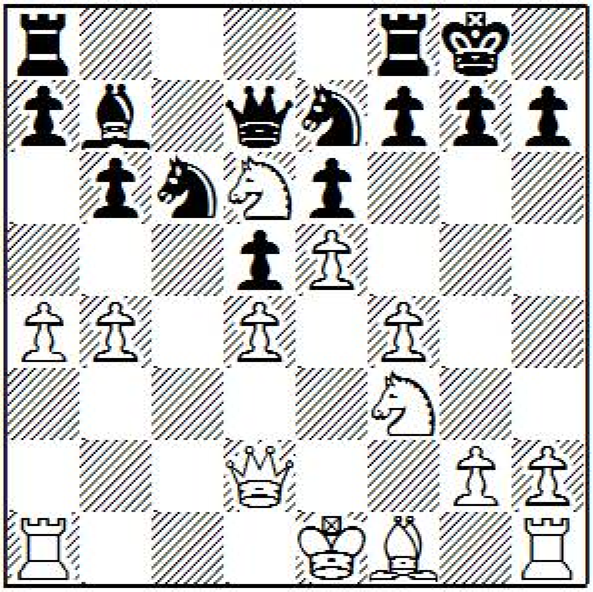
12 b4!

'Strangely enough, this more or less conventional move (by which White prevents ... Na5 and at the same time forces a clearing of the situation in the centre) created a kind of small sensation at the time; the late Dr Tarrasch, for instance, called it in his comments "highly original". To my mind more surprising than the move is the fact that a player of Nimzowitsch's class, when adopting the plan started by 8 ... b6, did not take this possibility into serious consideration.' (Alekhine) Today procedures such as 12 b4 are already truisms ...

12 ... cxb4

After 12 ... c4 both 13 Nd6 and 13 Na3 are possible. Here, as Alekhine put it, 'White would not have much technical difficulty in exploiting, in a decisive manner, his advantage in space on the kingside.'

13 cxb4 Bb7 14 Nd6



14 ... f5?

‘The decisive strategical error. The only chance of obtaining some more space lay in 14 ... a5 15 Bb5 (better than 15 b5 Nb4) 15 ... axb4 16 0-0, after which the initiative of White – who would have to spend some time in regaining the b-pawn – would not develop so rapidly.’ (Alekhine)

This comment is somewhat superficial (in those days it was customary to ‘tell a good story’) – after 16 ... Nc8! it is altogether unclear whether there is any initiative: 17 Nxb7 (17 Nxc8 Rfxc8) 17 ... Qxb7 18 Bxc6 Qxc6 19 Rfc1 Qb7 20 Qxb4 Ne7 (21 a5 Ra6 equalises).

15 a5! Nc8 (if 15 ... bxa5, then 16 b5! Nd8 17 Rxa5 etc.) **16 Nxb7 Qxb7 17 a6! Qf7** (not 17 ... Qe7 18 Bb5! Nxb4? 19 Rb1 winning) **18 Bb5!**

Now the game is effectively over: Black is unable to defend adequately his c6- and c7-squares.

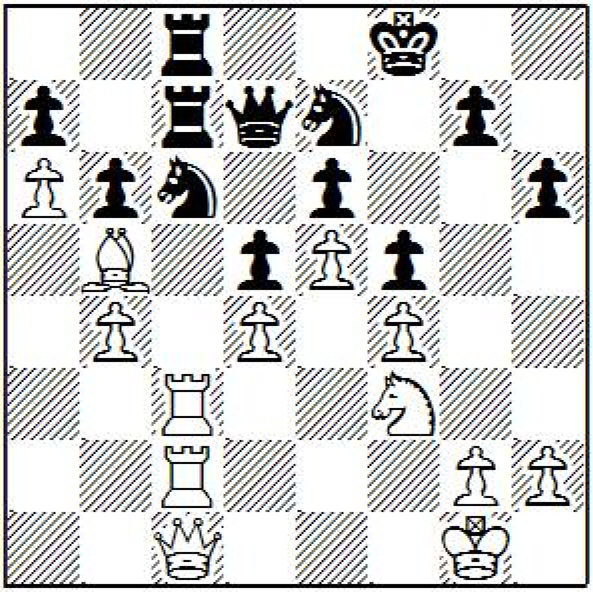
18 ... N8e7 19 0-0 h6 (or 19 ... Rfc8 20 Rfc1) **20 Rfc1 Rfc8 21 Rc2 Qe8**

If 21 ... Nd8 the champion was intending 22 Rac1 Rxc2 23 Rxc2 Rc8 24 Rxc8 (24 Bd7!? Rxc2 25 Qxc2) 24 ... Nxc8 25 Qc3 Ne7 26 Qc7 and wins.

22 Rac1 (the alternative 22 Ra3! Rc7 23 Rac3 Rac8 24 Qc1 would have won more quickly) **22 ... Rab8 23 Qe3 Rc7 24 Rc3! Qd7 25 R1c2 Kf8**

‘A desperate idea in a desperate position!’ (Alekhine)

26 Qc1 (after the tripling of the heavy pieces on the c-file White’s pressure becomes unbearable) **26 ... Rbc8**



27 Ba4!

‘The last link of the positional attack started by 15 a5. In order to save the piece threatened by 28 b5 Black must sacrifice the b-pawn. After this he succeeds in protecting the important squares with his king, but must still resign as a consequence of complete zugzwang.’ (Alekhine)

27 ... b5 28 Bxb5 Ke8 29 Ba4 Kd8 30 h4! 1-0

30 ... h5 31 Kh2 g6 32 g3 Qe8 33 b5 wins.

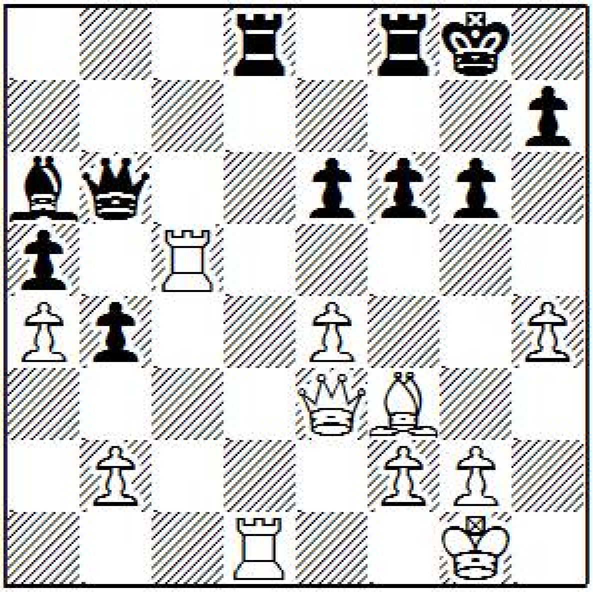
After performing splendidly for the French team in the Olympiads in Hamburg 1930 and Prague 1931, the champion continued his triumphal procession at the double-round super-tournament in Bled 1931: 1. Alekhine – 20½ out of 26 (again undefeated!); 2. Bogoljubow – 15; 3. Nimzowitsch – 14; 4-7. Vidmar, Kashdan, Flohr and Stoltz – 13½; 8. Tartakower – 13; 9-10. Kostic and Spielmann – 12½; 11. Maróczy – 12 etc.

Alekhine had clearly reached the peak of his career. The style of his victories created an enormous impression. Who else in chess history has won so many serious games with the help of brilliant tactical strokes?

Game 137

A.Alekhine-S.Flohr

Bled 1931

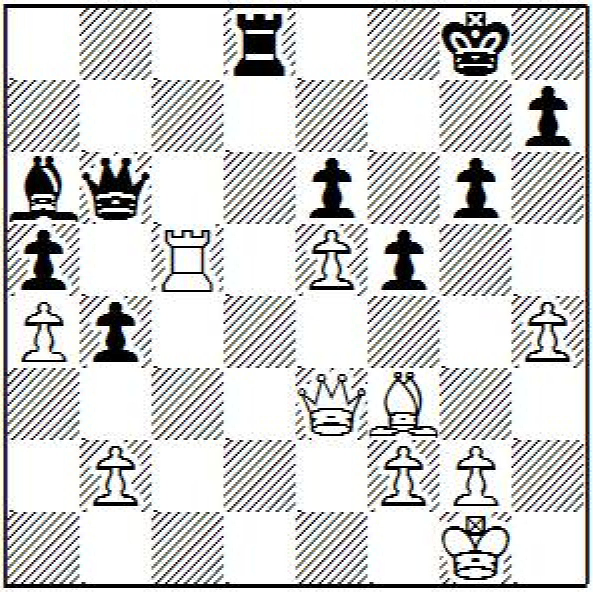


White’s positional advantage is clear, but he needs to hurry: if Black can avoid direct threats, he may save the game. There are some combinative motifs: the black king’s defences are weakened and in addition, as Alekhine put it, White can begin to ‘speculate on the unprotected position of the enemy’s queen.’

27 Rxd8 Rxd8 (if 27 ... Qxd8, then 28 e5! f5 29 Rc6 Bc8 30 Qc5 wins) **28 e5!**

A useful move, exposing the enemy king. But the main thing is its tactical content: the immediate 28 Rc8? (hoping for 28 ... Qxe3? 29 Rxd8+) does not work because of 28 ... Qd6. Now, however, the d6-square is under control!

28 ... f5?



A blunder, but after 28 ... fxe5 29 Qxe5 or 29 h5!? the win for White is merely a question of time.

29 Rc8!! 1-0

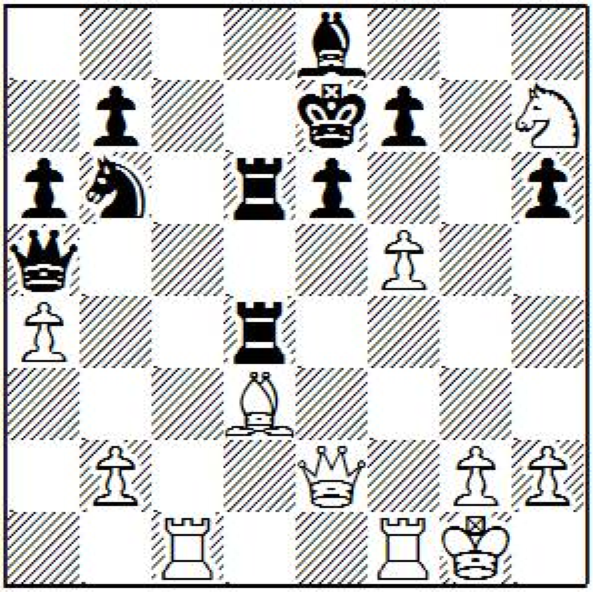
He loses his rook. This is the same theme as in the game with Grünfeld (*Game No.120*).

As was the case earlier, his opponents were unable to withstand the fierce Alekhine onslaught and would collapse, often in debatable, still completely unclear, or even favourable positions. In the following game the ‘old wolf’ Maróczy blundered badly.

Game 138

A.Alekhine-G.Maróczy

Bled 1931



25 b4!?

Another burst of imagination! Alekhine was terribly proud of this move and he attached two exclamation marks to it, although the computer is of a ‘different opinion’. If immediately 25 Qh5, then 25 ... Qd2! But 25 fxe6!? and Qf3 came into consideration.

25 ... Qxb4

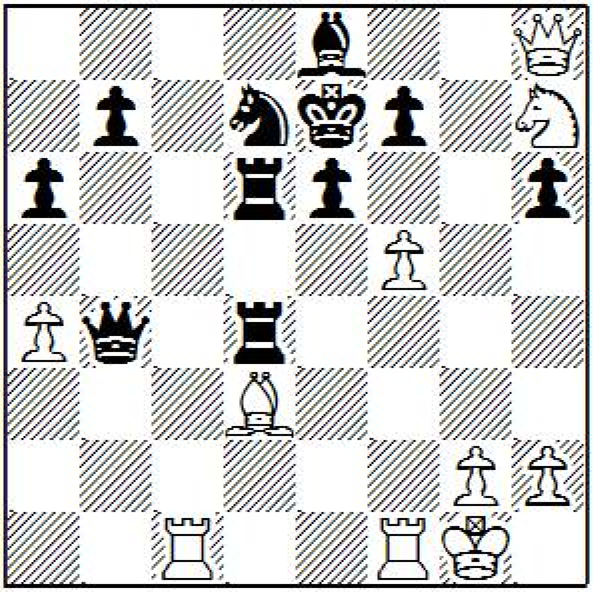
‘An interesting finish would have occurred after 25 ... Rxb4 26 Qh5! e5 27 f6+ Kd8 28 Qxh6 Rxd3 29 Qf8 Rd7 30 Rc5 Qxa4 31 Rxe5 and wins.’ (Alekhine) Alas, after 31 ... Kc7! there is no trace of a win: 32 Qc5+ Kb8 33 Rxe8+ Ka7 34 Qe5 a5, or 32 Qxe8 Qc2 33 Nf8 Rb2 34 Rg5 Rd1 35 Qe5+ Kc6 equalising. It would appear that slightly more is promised by 26 fxe6!?, but then it is not clear for what the b-pawn was given up.

26 Qe5! (with the threat of 27 Qf6+ Kd7 28 Nf8 mate) **26 ... Nd7**

‘Protects both critical squares and – apparently – at last wins the bishop.’ (Alekhine) In my opinion, 26 ... Nd5!? 27 Rb1 Qc5 28 Rxb7+ Kd8 29 Kh1 Rxd3 30 Rb8+ Kc7 31 Rxe8 Qc3 32 Rc8+ Kxc8 33 Qxd6 Ne3 34 Qxa6+ Kd8 35 Qa8+ Kc7 is also unclear.

27 Qh8!

The culmination of this sharp skirmish.



27 ... Rxd3??

A black-out. ‘The best reply 27 ... Qb6 would have forced White to disclose the last point of the combination started on move 25 – 28 a5! (the triumph of the neglected pawn!) with two lines: 28 ... Qxa5 29 Rc8, or 28 ... Qa7 29 f6+ etc., as in the game.’ (Alekhine)

But in fact the best reply was 27 ... Rc6! 28 Rxc6 bxc6 29 fxe6 fxe6 30 Nf6 Nxf6 31 Qxf6+ Kd7 32 Qxh6 Rd5, when there is still all to play for.

28 f6+! 1-0

28 ... Nxf6 29 Qxf6+ Kd7 30 Nf8 mate or 28 ... Kd8 29 Qxe8+! Kxe8 30 Rc8 mate. One of those games that produced with Alekhine a dangerous stereotype: ‘I can play what I want against them!’ Later, in matches with Bogoljubow and Euwe, he would ‘throw’ material both where it was necessary, and where it wasn’t ...

In Bled Alekhine established a legendary achievement: he finished 5½ points(!) ahead of the second prize-winner Bogoljubow. And 6½ ahead of Nimzowitsch, whom he crushed in both of their games.

Game 139

A.Alekhine-A.Nimzowitsch

Bled 1931

French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 Ne2

A ‘perfectly harmless’ move (4 e5! is correct). ‘I selected it, however, because I knew that already on one occasion (against Sir G. Thomas at Marienbad, 1925) Nimzowitsch had shown an exaggerated voracity (6 ... f5) without having been duly punished for it.’ (Alekhine)

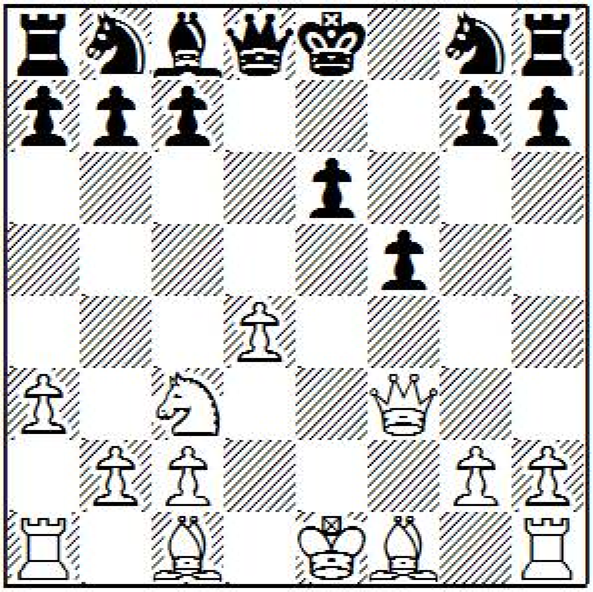
4 ... dxe4 5 a3 Bxc3+ (5 ... Be7 6 Nxe4 Nc6! is also good – *Game No.142*) **6 Nxc3 f5?!**

Nowadays no one plays this. Theory recommends 6 ... Nc6! 7 Bb5 Ne7 etc.

7 f3!?

A surprise – a sacrifice of another pawn! The aforementioned game with Thomas went 7 Bf4 Nf6 8 f3, and after 8 ... 0-0 (8 ... exf3 9 Qxf3! Qxd4? 10 Nb5) 9 fxe4 Nxe4 10 Nxe4 fxe4 11 Qd2 Nd7 12 Be2 c5 13 0-0 cxd4 14 Qxd4 Qb6 Black achieved a normal position.

7 ... exf3 8 Qxf3



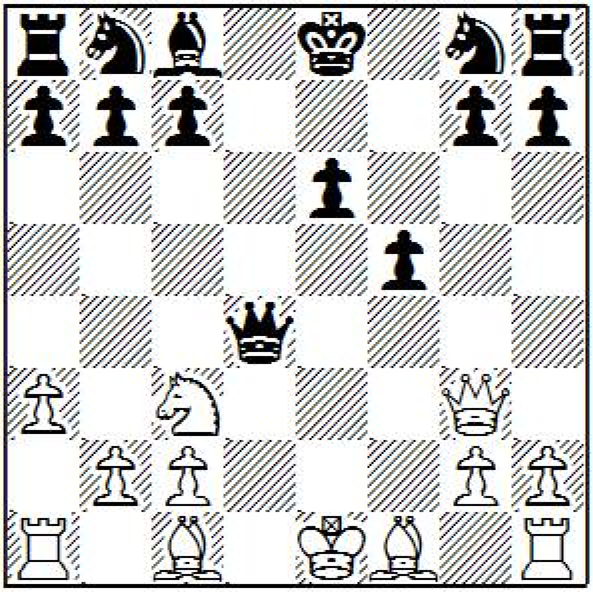
8 ... Qxd4

‘This move is as good – or as bad – as 8 ... Qh4+ 9 g3 Qxd4: in that case White would play 10 Nb5 (*Alekhine. himself later played 10 Bf4!? – G. K.*), and Black would not have had – as in the actual game – the defence

10 ... Qh4+ 11 g3 Qe7 etc..’ (Alekhine) 8 ... Nf6 9 Bf4 (9 Bg5) 9 ... 0-0 10 0-0-0 c6 11 h3 was to White’s advantage.

9 Qg3!

Threatening both 10 Nb5 (10 ... Qe4+ 11 Be2) and 10 Bf4(e3). 9 Be3!? Qg4 10 Qf2 Nf6 11 h3 Qg6 12 0-0-0 0-0 13 Bc4 Nc6 14 g4 and 9 Nb5!? Qh4+ 10 g3 Qe7 11 Qc3! Na6 12 Bf4 have also been tried.



9 ... Nf6!?

‘This bold move is Black’s comparatively best chance. Insufficient would be 9 ... Ne7 because of 10 Be3! Qf6 11 0-0-0 etc..’ (Alekhine) But in my opinion, here the play is unclear: 11 ... c6 (but not 11 ... e5?! 12 Bg5 Qg6 13 Bxe7 Qxg3 14 hxg3 Kxe7 15 Nd5+) 12 Bg5 Qg6 13 h4 0-0 14 h5 Qf7 etc.

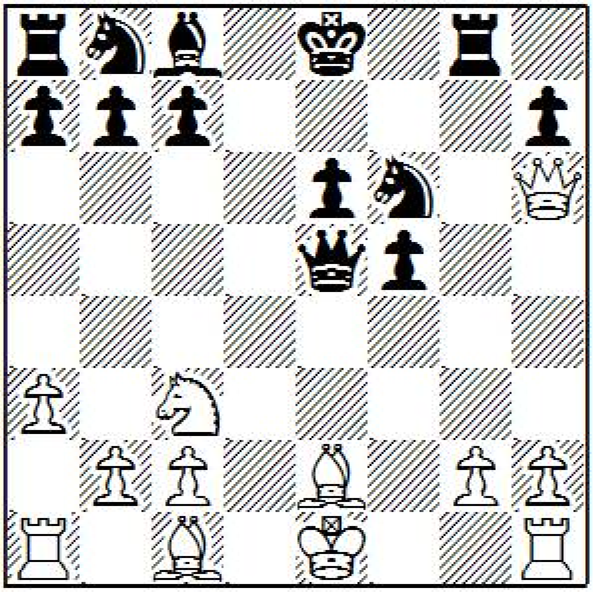
Evidently inferior was 9 ... Nc6?! 10 Nb5! Qe4+ 11 Be3! or 9 ... Qd7?! 10 Bf4 Nf6 11 Rd1 Qf7 12 Nb5! Na6 13 Bxc7 0-0 14 Be5 with a strong initiative for the pawn.

10 Qxg7 Qe5+

For some reason Alekhine attaches a question mark to this move, recommending 10 ... Rg8 11 Qxc7 Nc6, when ‘there would not be a win for White by means of 12 Nb5 because of 12 ... Qh4+ 13 g3 Qe4+ 14 Kf2 Qxc2+ followed by ... Ne4.’ On the other hand, after 12 Bf4! Black’s position is clearly worse, whereas after the move in the game all is still not so clear.

11 Be2 Rg8 (if 11 ... Ng4?! Kmoch gives 12 Qg5 Nc6 13 Bf4, although there is also 12 Qxe5 Nxe5 13 Bf4) **12 Qh6**

Thanks to his two bishops, the weakness of the dark squares in the opponent's position and the rather unsettled state of the enemy king, White has highly promising compensation for the pawn.



12 ... Rg6

An important moment. The capture 12 ... Rxg2 is refuted not by 13 Bf4?! Qd4 14 Be3 Qe5 15 0-0-0 (Kmoch) in view of the unclear 15 ... Rg6 16 Qh3 Nc6 17 Rhe1 Bd7, but only with a continuation not suggested by anyone: 13 Bg5! Nbd7 (13 ... Ne4?! 14 Bh5+ Kd7 15 0-0-0+ Kc6 16 Bf3 Rf2 17 Bf6 wins) 14 0-0-0 etc.

13 Qh4 Bd7

Now 13 ... Rxg2? is bad because of 14 Bf4 – 14 ... Rxe2+ (14 ... Qd4 15 Rd1) 15 Nxe2 Qxb2 16 Rd1 Nbd7 17 Rg1 and White wins.

But 13 ... Rg4!? would have given Black definite counterplay: 14 Qf2 (14 Qh3 Nc6 15 0-0 Rg7; 14 Qh6 Rg6) 14 ... Ne4!? (instead of 14 ... Nc6 15 0-0 Rg7 16 Bf4 Qd4 17 Be3 Qe5 18 Rad1 Ng4 19 Bxg4 Rxg4 20 Rfe1 with the initiative for White) 15 Nxe4 Rxe4 16 Qf3 Nc6 17 Qh5+ Kd7 18 c3 f4 19 Qxh7+ Ne7 20 Kd1 Qd5+ 21 Bd2 Rxe2 22 Kxe2 Qxg2+ 23 Kd3 e5 24 Rhg1 Qd5+ 25 Kc2 Kd6. The variation is, of course, a hypothetical one, but it is more or less representative.

14 Bg5! Bc6?

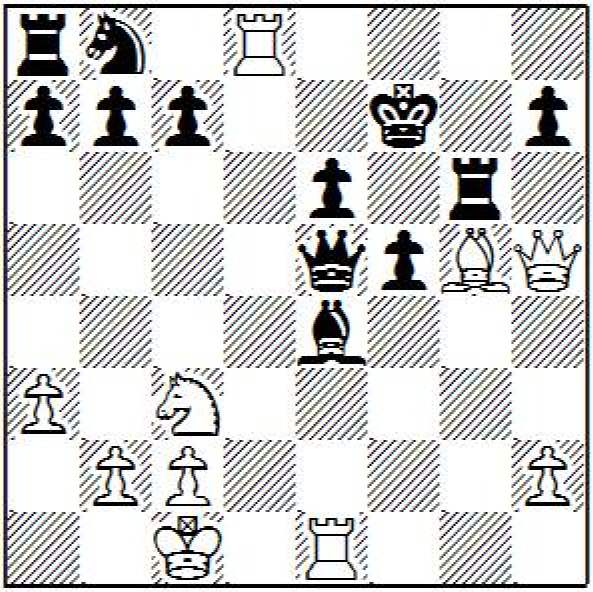
The decisive mistake: after the opponent's reply the black king is stuck in the centre and there is nothing more to comment on.

Essential was 14 ... Nc6 (but not 14 ... h6? 15 Bf4! Qc5 16 Bh5) 15 0-0-0 0-0-0 16 Bh5 (or 16 Rhe1!? h6! 17 Bxh6 Ng4! 18 Bxg4 Rxg4 19 Qxg4 fxg4 20 Rxe5 Nxe5 with approximate equality) 16 ... Nxh5!? (Kmoch's idea 16 ... Rxg5 17 Qxg5 Rg8 is refuted by 18 Qd2!) 17 Bxd8 f4 18 Be7 Qf5 19 Rd2 Rg4 20 Qf2 Nxe7 21 Qxa7 Nc6 22 Qa8+ Nb8 23 Rxd7 Kxd7 24 Qxb8 Rxg2 25 Rd1+ Kc6 26 Qe8+ Kb6 27 Qa4 Nf6 28 Qb4+ Kc6 29 Qc4+ Kb6 with a draw.

15 0-0-0! Bxg2

With such a king, Black is already obliged to take risks. If 15 ... Nbd7, then 16 Rhe1 Be4 (16 ... 0-0-0 17 Bh5 Rxg5 18 Rxe5 Rxh5 19 Qd4 wins) 17 Bh5 Nxh5 18 Qxh5 Nf6 (18 ... Nf8 19 g4) 19 Bxf6 Qxf6 20 Nxe4 fxe4 21 Qb5+!

16 Rhe1 Be4 17 Bh5 Nxh5 18 Rd8+ Kf7 19 Qxh5 1-0



19 ... Kg7 20 Nxe4 fxe4 21 Bh6+ and Qxe5. 'This was, I believe, the shortest defeat in Nimzowitsch's career.' (Alekhine)

And not surprisingly: in this game the ‘great Aron’ was forced to try and solve problems that were completely abhorrent to him. He was accustomed to thinking in terms of points and other positional categories, manoeuvring, fencing with a musketeer’s sword – and here, in violation of all ‘proprieties’, he was simply bludgeoned! Not without reason, on standing up from the board, did poor Nimzowitsch exclaim in a fit of temper: ‘He deals with us like inexperienced fledglings.’

After also losing to the champion in the second half of the tournament, the author of *My System* at last found an explanation for his opponent’s fantastic successes: ‘Alekhine hypnotises us all!’ A familiar story: thirty years earlier this had been said about Lasker, and thirty years later, also after a triumph in Bled – about Tal ...

In fact it was with something else that Alekhine succeeded. He was the first who could play material down for a long time as though nothing had happened. Chigorin also played this way a little, but he did it more spontaneously, intuitively, whereas Alekhine did it quite deliberately! He would sacrifice material for some, at times unclear compensation, and through lack of familiarity his opponents would usually be unable to comprehend the situation and would begin to ‘drift’.

Not without reason did Alekhine’s manner of play not appeal to Fischer – a player of classical style, who did not like giving up material ‘just like that’. The forcible disruption of the balance irritated Fischer! But for Alekhine it was the norm – to give up a couple of pawns (as in the game with Nimzowitsch) or even a piece, but to gain a strong initiative. In contrast to his colleagues, he knew fairly precisely in which position it should all work out, and in which it would not.

‘In Alekhine’s play,’ wrote Tartakower, ‘one is struck not so much by the *genius* and not so much by the *well-considered* nature of his play, but rather the ideal combination of these two, apparently rather incompatible elements: well-considered genius! And for universality of style Alekhine has no rivals, since whereas Philidor mainly constructs pawn chains, Morphy attacks the king, Steinitz aims for methodicalness, Lasker for flexibility, and Capablanca for logicality, Alekhine, in contrast to all these champions, seeks *a struggle as such*.’

In 1932 the world champion won a further two quite strong tournaments – in London (1. Alekhine – 9 out of 11; 2. Flohr – 8) and in Bern (1. Alekhine – 12½ out of 15; 2-3. Flohr and Euwe – 11½; 4. Sultan

Khan – 11; 5-6. Bernstein and Bogoljubow – 10 etc.). A fly in the ointment was caused by a sensational open letter by Spielmann ‘I accuse!’, which talked about the part played by Alekhine in Capablanca not being invited to San Remo and Bled, and Nimzowitsch and Spielmann to London and Bern. If only the author had known how the champions’ ‘powers’ would expand during the times of Botvinnik and Karpov! And what do you think, was Capablanca a party to the non-invitation of Lasker to New York 1927? Alas, regarding this, Spielmann, who was a participant in that tournament, keeps silent ...

In the autumn the champion set off an a ‘round-the-world trip’ lasting several months and in 1933 he played only in a small tournament in Paris (+7 =2) and in the Olympiad in Folkestone (+8 -1 =3), but on the other hand he gave hundreds of successful simultaneous displays and beat the 1925 world records for blindfold play – his own (28 boards) and that of Réti (28), by playing 32 games simultaneously (+19 -4 =9) at the world exhibition in Chicago. America applauded!

Early in 1934, scoring +4 =5 in Hastings, he finished half a point behind the 25-year-old Czech grandmaster Salo Flohr, who a month before this had drawn a match (6-6) with another rising star of world chess – the 22-year-old USSR champion Mikhail Botvinnik. These were the first, as yet altogether imperceptible signs of the coming changes at the summit of chess ...

The champion immediately compensated for this comparative failure, firstly, by marrying the respectable 58-year-old American Grace Wishart (in Paris they joked that Alekhine had married Philidor’s widow), then by his victory in the ‘return match’ with Bogoljubow, and finally by his triumph in the super-tournament Zürich 1934: 1. Alekhine – 13 out of 15; 2-3. Flohr and Euwe – 12; 4. Bogoljubow – 11½; 5. Lasker – 10; 6-7. Bernstein and Nimzowitsch – 9 etc.

Particular intrigue was imparted to this tournament by the participation of Lasker, who had not played in any competitions for nine years. For Alekhine this meeting with the legendary figure was of crucial significance: he had finished behind him both 20 years earlier in St Petersburg, and 10 years earlier in New York, so that it was time to settle the account, especially with the white pieces.

I should like to preface this duel with an interesting opinion by Fischer: ‘Alekhine is a player I’ve never really understood. He always wanted a superior centre; he manoeuvred his pieces toward the kingside, and around the 25th move, began to mate his opponent. He disliked exchanges, preferring to play with many pieces on the board. His play was fantastically complicated, more so than any player before or since. Alekhine once beat Lasker in about 23 [actually 26] moves; his pieces converged on the kingside, and the game ended with a sudden death blow.'

Game 140

A.Alekhine-Em.Lasker

Zürich 1934

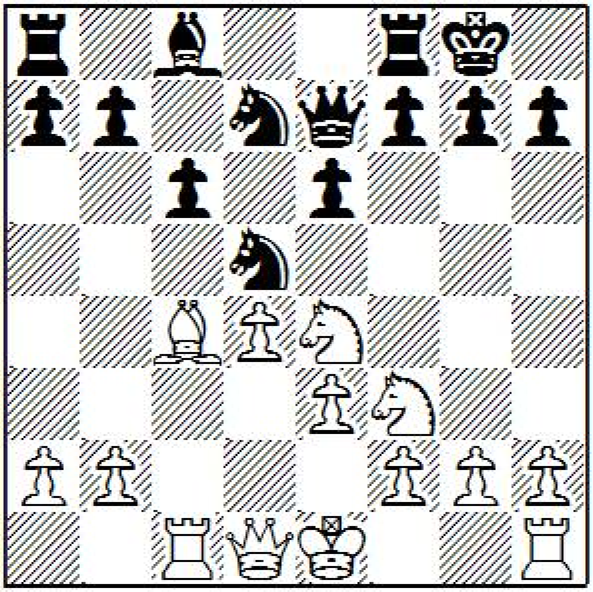
Queen's Gambit D67

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 Be7 5 Bg5 Nbd7 6 e3 0-0 7 Rc1 c6 8 Bd3 dxc4

The inclusion of 8 ... h6 9 Bh4 in the event of 9 ... dxc4 10 Bxc4 Nd5 11 Bxe7 Qxe7 12 0-0 Nxc3 13 Rxc3 e5 (13 ... b6!?) 14 Bb3! exd4 15 exd4 Nf6 16 Re1 Qd6 17 Ne5! is to White's advantage (Karpov-Yusupov, London 7th matchgame 1989; it is curious that this position arose from a Lasker Defence).

9 Bxc4 Nd5 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 11 Ne4

Alekhine's invention against the Capablanca Variation. The Cuban himself (in games with A. Steiner at Budapest 1928 and Kan at Moscow 1935) chose the main line – 11 0-0, but after 11 ... Nxc3 12 Rxc3 e5 White has no advantage.



11 ... N5f6 12 Ng3 e5

‘An interesting attempt by Lasker to solve swiftly the problem of the queen’s bishop. Capablanca regularly played 12 ... Qb4+ here in our matchgames and after the exchange of queens (*13 Qd2 Qxd2+ 14 Kxd2 Rd8 Game No. 127; 14 ... c5! – G. K.*), succeeded in drawing, but not without difficulties.’ (Alekhine)

13 0-0 exd4 14 Nf5

14 Qxd4 Nb6 15 Bb3 Be6 is harmless. According to Alekhine, 14 exd4 Nb6 15 Re1 Qd6 16 Bb3 is more energetic, and if 16 ... Bg4, then 17 h3! Bxf3 18 Qxf3, sacrificing the d4-pawn for the sake of a strong attack: 18 ... Qxd4?! 19 Nf5 etc. But after 16 ... Nbd5! Black has a comfortable game.

14 ... Qd8 15 N3xd4 (here too after 15 Qxd4 or 15 exd4 Black equalises by 15 ... Nb6) **15 ... Ne5 16 Bb3 Bxf5 17 Nxf5 Qb6?**

Here is where it tells that Lasker was never an openings expert and relied almost exclusively on common sense! It required only one accurate move of Black – 17 ... g6!, and the position would have become a dead draw: 18 Qd4 (18 Qd6 Re8!; 18 Nd6 or 18 Nd4 – 18 ... Qe7) 18 ... Qxd4 19 Nxd4 Rad8 (Euwe-Flohr, Nottingham 1936).

18 Qd6!

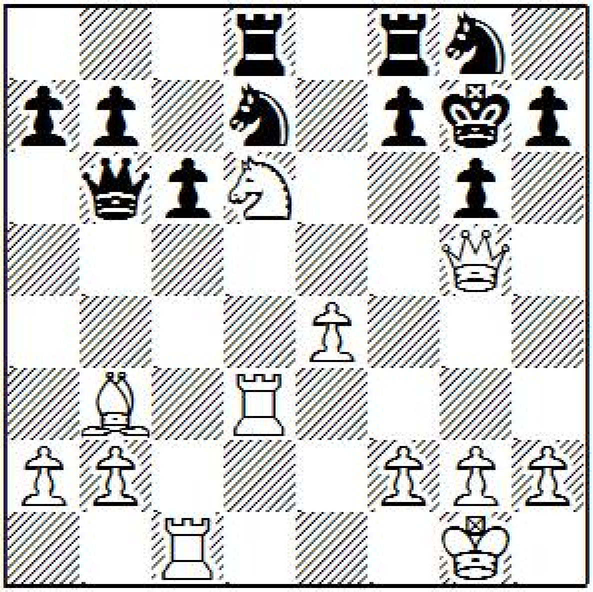
The former world champion either underestimated or overlooked this terrible thrust, after which Black's game immediately goes downhill.

18 ... Ned7 (also bad is 18 ... Ng6 19 Nh6+ gxh6 20 Qxf6 Qd8 21 Qc3) **19 Rfd1 Rad8 20 Qg3 g6 21 Qg5!**

'With the main threat 22 Rd6. Black has already no real defence.' (Alekhine)

21 ... Kh8 22 Nd6 Kg7 23 e4! (clearing the third rank for the rook) **23 ... Ng8 24 Rd3!**

With the threat of 25 Rf3.



24 ... f6

There would have been an equally spectacular finish after 24 ... h6 25 Nf5+ Kh7 26 Nxh6! f6 27 Nf5 fxg5 28 Rh3+ Nh6 29 Rxh6 mate.

25 Nf5+ Kh8 26 Qxg6!! 1-0

A stunning blow! In view of 26 ... hxg6 27 Rh3+ Nh6 28 Rxh6 mate, Black resigned.

It is well known that 13 is the lucky number of the 13th world champion, but I was surprised to learn that the fourth champion also had such a number, only ... twice as big! This is the evidence of Flohr: 'Alekhine considered twice the "devil's dozen" – the number "26" to be lucky for him. Once he bet on this number in roulette and won. The date of his marriage to Grace Wishart was 26 March, his second match with

Bogoljubow lasted 26 games, and his memorable win over Lasker was in 26 moves! Well, Alekhine wasn't the last world champion to believe in omens ... '

At the closing banquet Alekhine expressed his profound admiration for Lasker and called him his teacher ... Although he brilliantly won Zürich 1934, the champion nevertheless lost one game – to the Dutchman Max Euwe. That was one more barely audible warning bell. If you have ears, you should listen! Alas ... 'Whom God wishes to destroy, he first makes mad.'

Dutch Heights

Towards the end of 1935 something incredible happened in Holland: Euwe won his match against Alekhine – 15½-14½ (+9 -8 =13) and took the world crown from him! I will give the details of this drama in the chapter about the fifth world champion, and here I will merely say that initially it appeared that the Russian star's new opponent would suffer the same fate as Bogoljubow.

Alekhine immediately took the lead – 1-0, 3-1. Especially impressive was his win in the fourth game, where he again displayed his extraordinary imagination.

Often in the games of the former champions we see archaic techniques, the slow development of events and seemingly naïve 'little ruses'. Well, every chess era had its values. But the greatest masters sometimes made breakthroughs into the future, demonstrating bold ideas that were ahead of their time. That was the case in this game.

Game 141

M.Euwe-A.Alekhine

World Championship Match, Holland 1935, 4th game

Grünfeld Defence D81

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Qb3

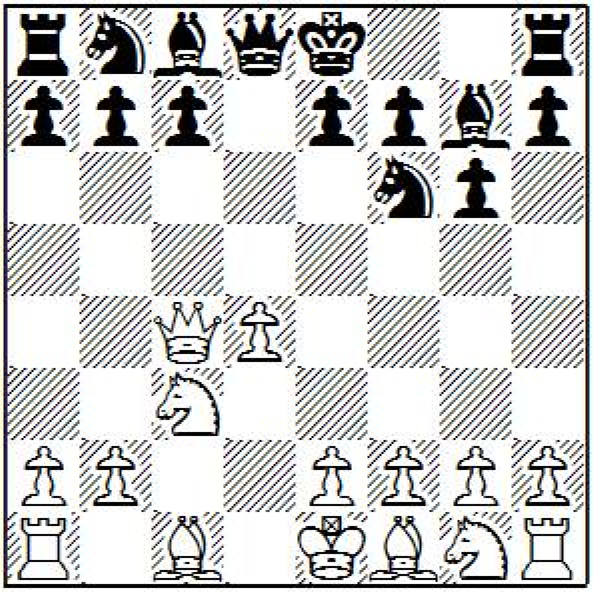
Euwe was well informed about the ideas of Soviet masters – it was not for nothing that he played a training tournament with them (1934). A year earlier in the 8th USSR Championship the young Botvinnik had used 4 Qb3 to defeat Levenfish, and the latter then used it in Moscow 1935 against Flohr and Spielmann.

The first theoretical steps of the new opening! Life has shown that the most dangerous for Black (apart from 4 cxd5) is the variation 4 Nf3 Bg7 5 Qb3!, following the example of the source game Ragozin-Romanovsky (Leningrad 1932).

4 ... dxc4 5 Qxc4 Bg7

‘Also playable is 5 ... Be6 6 Qb5+ Nc6 7 Nf3, but now not 7 ... Rb8 (as in the 2nd matchgame, 1935) but 7 ... Nd5! etc., with fairly good counter-chances.’ (Alekhine) Indeed, in the game Alekhine refers after 7 ... Rb8 8 Ne5 (according to Euwe, 8 e4 a6 9 Qd3 Bg4 10 d5 Bxf3 11 gxf3 Ne5 12 Qd1 is also strong) 8 ... Bd7 9 Nxd7 Qxd7 10 d5 White gained the advantage. But 7 ... Nd5 also does not equalise in view of 8 e4 Ndb4 9 Qa4 Bd7 10 Qd1 e5 11 a3 exd4 12 Nb1 Na6 13 b4, as was shown in the late 1930s, and then also in the game Petrosian-Benko (Los Angeles 1963).

More topical now is 6 ... Bd7!? 7 Qb3 Nc6 8 Nf3 Bg7 9 e4 0-0 10 h3 Rb8 11 Be3 b5 with a double-edged game, or 7 Qxb7 Nc6!? 8 e3 Rb8 9 Qa6 Nb4 10 Qe2 c5 with compensation for the pawn.



6 Bf4

In the 12th game Euwe chose 6 e4 0-0 7 Nf3!, and this position became one of the *tabiyas* of the 20th century (it will be mentioned further in the second volume).

6 ... c6 7 Rd1?!

Here too 7 Nf3 0-0 8 e4 is more active, for example: 8 ... b5 9 Qb3 Qa5 10 Bd3 Be6 11 Qd1 Rd8 12 0-0 Bg4 13 e5 Nd5 14 Nxd5 cxd5 15 Rc1! (Miles-Kasparov, Basel 2nd matchgame 1986), or 8 ... Qa5 9 b4 Qd8 10 Rb1 (10 Rd1!?) 10 ... b5 11 Qd3 a5 12 a3 (Khalifman-Leko, Budapest 3rd matchgame 2000) – in both cases White emerged from the opening with the better game.

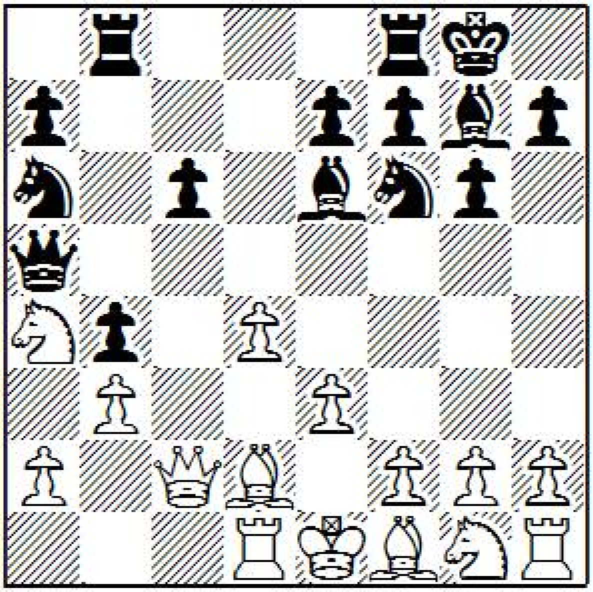
7 ... Qa5 8 Bd2 b5?

An error in reply. ‘There are some moves of mine in the first Euwe match which I actually simply cannot understand. Neither before nor since have I played such decidedly unsound chess, especially in the openings! The simple 8 ... Qb6 9 Bc1 Bf5 followed by ... 0-0 would have secured Black a distinct advantage in development.’ (Alekhine)

9 Qb3 b4 (preventing e2-e4, but at what a price!) **10 Na4 Na6 11 e3 Be6**

If 11 ... 0-0 the champion did not like 12 Bc4! (but not 12 Bxa6?! Bxa6 13 Bxb4 Qb5 or 13 Qxb4 Qd5).

12 Qc2 0-0 13 b3! (dangerous is 13 Qxc6?! Nc7 with the threat of 14 ... Bd7 or 14 ... Bxa2) **13 ... Rab8**



From the viewpoint of the classical school, Black's opening play has been an abomination: he has a weak, isolated pawn at c6, a 'bad' knight at a6, and insufficient control of the centre. Alekhine was counting on the latent energy in Black's position, but after his mistake on the eighth move his task has become significantly more difficult. However, it only requires White to dally slightly, and an explosion can follow!

14 Bd3

'Because of his slightly belated development White decides not to take the c-pawn – and rightly so; after 14 Qxc6 Bc8! the open c-file would become a dangerous weapon in Black's hands – for instance, 15 Nf3 Bb7 16 Qc2 Rfc8 17 Qb1 Ne4, eventually followed by ... Nc3 etc..' (Alekhine) 14 Bxa6!? Qxa6 15 Nc5 was tempting, but Euwe did not want to exchange his important light-squared bishop for the weak knight at a6. His classical outlook demanded that he should seriously punish his opponent for his 'anti-positional play'.

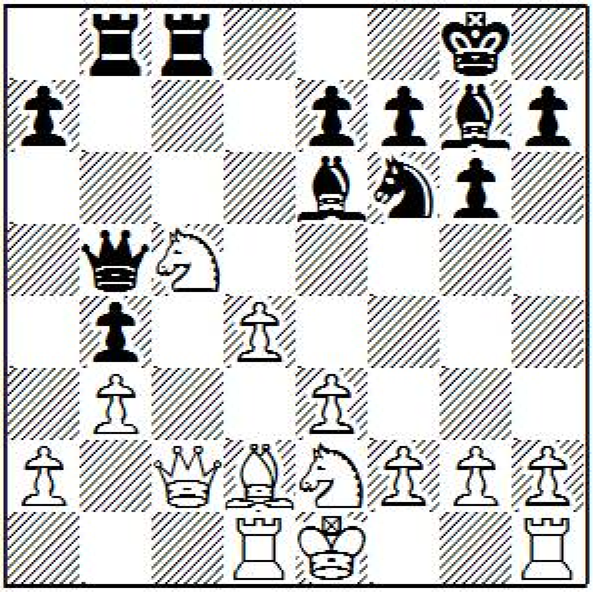
14 ... Rfc8 15 Ne2?!

'Obviously underestimating the value of the following pawn offer; otherwise he would have continued with 15 Bxa6 Qxa6 16 Nc5 Qb5 17 Nf3! (*17 Nxe6?! fxe6 18 Nf3 c5! – G. K.*) 17 ... Nd7 18 Rc1 etc. with the better endgame prospects.' (Alekhine)

15 ... c5!

The genie is released from the bottle! Moreover, this is not a gesture of despair, as it might have seemed to Euwe, but 'an absolutely correct combination, which would have given – against White's best defence – easy equality.' (Alekhine)

16 Bxa6 Qxa6 17 Nxc5 Qb5

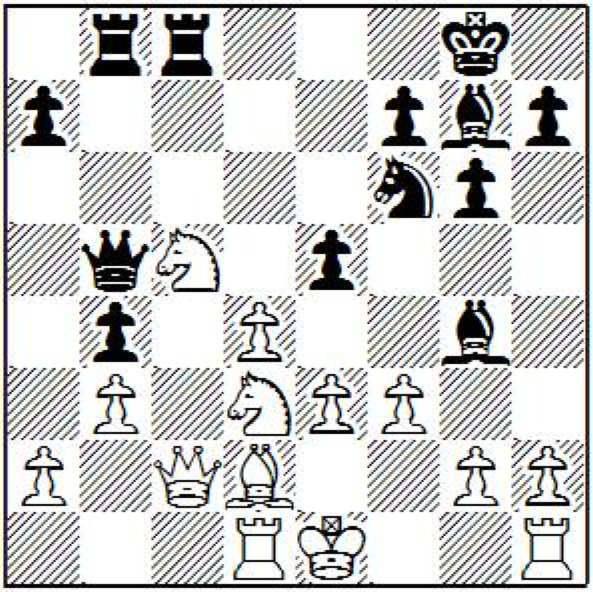


18 Nf4?

Another error – and a hurricane breaks out! 'My opponent, fortunately for me, underestimated the danger. The correct defence consisted in 18 e4! Nd7 (*but not 18 ... Bg4?! 19 Bf4!, for example: 19 ... e5 20 Bxe5 Nxe4 21 Bxb8 Nxc5 22 dxc5 Bxe2 23 Qxe2 Re8 24 Be5! – G. K.*) 19 Be3 Bxd4 20 Nxd4 Qxc5 21 Qxc5 Nxc5 etc., with a probable draw as a result.' (Alekhine) Also interesting is 19 ... Bg4!? 20 f3 e5! 21 fxg4 exd4 22 Bxd4 Bxd4 23 Nxd4 Qxc5 24 0-0 (or 24 Qxc5 Nxc5) 24 ... Ne5 25 Qxc5 Rxc5, again with approximate equality.

18 ... Bg4! 19 f3 (or 19 Rc1 e5!) **19 ... e5!** (a powerful blow against White's foundations) **20 Nfd3**

20 fxg4 exf4 was no better.



20 ... exd4!!

‘A pretty and exactly calculated piece offer.’ (Alekhine) Open lines are more important than material: the white king is caught in the centre!

21 fxg4 (21 exd4 Nd5!; 21 e4 Nd7 etc.) **21 ... dxe3 22 Bxe3?**

Mistakes come in pairs ... ‘A comparatively more difficult variation for Black was 22 Bxb4 Nd5 23 a3 (*23 a4? Nxb4 – G. K.*) 23 ... a5 24 Qc4! axb4! 25 Qxd5 bxa3 26 Rf1 (or 26 b4 Bc3+ followed by 27 ... Bxb4) 26 ... a2! 27 Rxf7 (*? – G. K.*) 27 ... Bc3+ 28 Ke2 Rxc5 and wins.’ (Alekhine)

‘More difficult’ is not the word! In my opinion, after 27 Ke2! White’s position is not at all worse and the only question is whether there is some compensation for the material deficit (27 ... Rc7 etc.). Therefore instead of 23 ... a5?! more promising is 23 ... e2! 24 Rc1 Qc6! 25 Bd2 Re8 and the extra piece does not guarantee the safety of White’s king.

22 ... Nxg4 23 Bf4

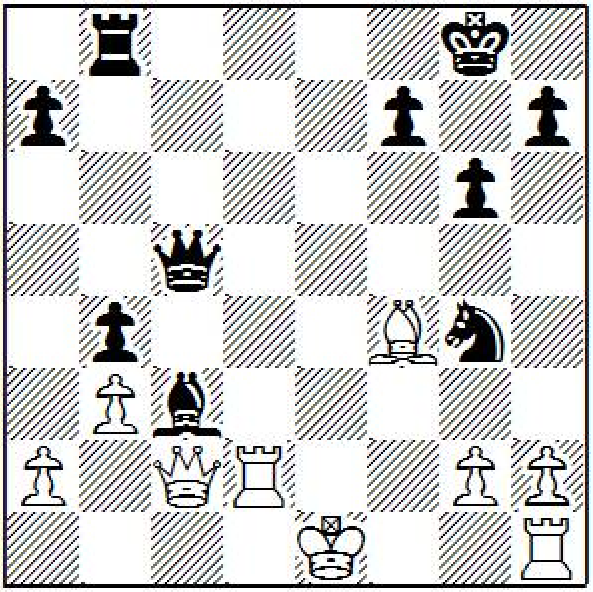
‘Anything else was equally unsatisfactory – for instance: 23 Bg1 Bc3+ (*23 ... Re8+!? 24 Kf1 Rb6! – G. K.*) 24 Kf1 Rb6, or 23 Bf2 Bc3+ 24 Kf1 Rc6! 25 Kg1 Nxf2 26 Qxf2 Rd8 etc., with a winning position.’ (Alekhine)

23 ... Bc3+ 24 Rd2

Sadly necessary. After 24 Ke2 Rxc5 25 Bxb8 Qe8+ 26 Be5 Rxe5+ 27 Nxe5 Qxe5+ 28 Kf3 (28 Kf1 Ne3+) it all ends with an immediate mate: 28 ... Qe3+! 29 Kxg4 h5+ 30 Kh4 Bf6 mate.

24 ... Rxc5 25 Nxc5 (25 Bxb8 Qe8+!) **25 ... Qxc5**

‘A shorter way to victory was 25 ... Re8+! with the following main variation: 26 Ne4 (*26 Kd1 Bxd2 27 Bxd2 Nf2+ – G. K.*) 26 ... f5 (*26 ... Bxd2+!? 27 Kxd2 Qf5! – G. K.*) 27 Kd1 Rxe4 28 Rd8+ Kf7 29 Bg5 f4! 30 Kc1 Re2 31 Qd3 Qxg5! and wins.’ (Alekhine)



26 Bxb8

The variation 26 Kf1 Re8 would have gladdened chess humanists: there is no reasonable defence against the threat of 27 ... Qf2+!! 28 Rxf2 Re1 mate (27 Qc1 Bxd2! or 27 g3 Qc6 and mate).

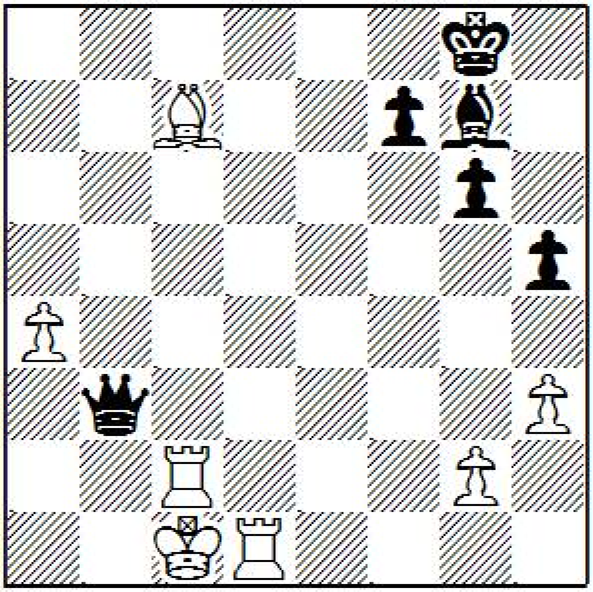
26 ... Qe7+ 27 Kd1 Ne3+ 28 Kc1 Nxc2 29 Rxc2

Through these exchanges it would appear that White has avoided the worst and that he is left with an acceptable material balance. But, alas, this position is completely hopeless for him: because of the open position of his king, the unwieldy rooks are unable to cope with the nimble black queen.

29 ... h5! (a long escape square – according to Alekhine, a necessary preparation for the next move) **30 Rd1 Bg7!**

Reminding White of his Achilles’ heel – the weakness of the dark squares and the long diagonal.

31 h3 a5 (31 ... Qg5+!?) **32 Bf4** (the hapless bishop is quite unable to find itself a safe square) **32 ... Qe4 33 Bc7 Qe3+ 34 Kb1 a4!** (not a moment's peace for the white king!) **35 bxa4** (there is nothing else) **35 ... b3 36 axb3 Qxb3+ 37 Kc1**



37 ... Bh6+?!

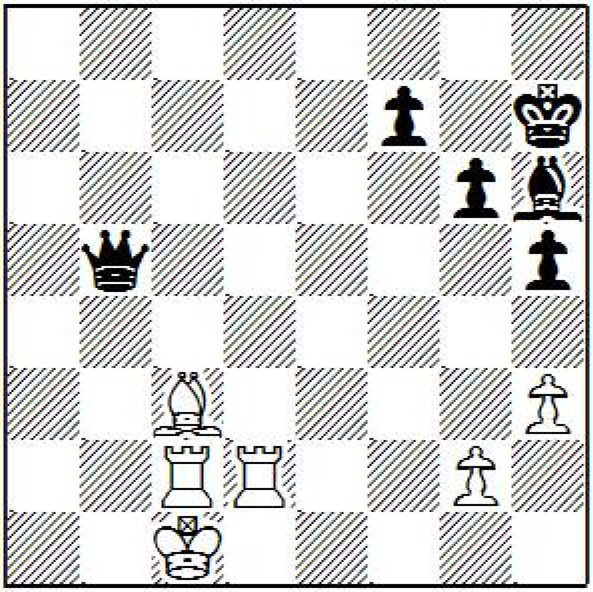
Very human! Alekhine makes no comment on this moment: in time-trouble he simply picks up the exchange and goes into a technically won endgame. But the machine immediately points out a pretty forced win with 'computer geometry': 37 ... Qe3+ 38 Kb1 (38 Rdd2 Qe1+ 39 Rd1 Bh6+; 38 Rcd2 Qc3+ 39 Kb1 Qxc7) 38 ... Qa3! and White loses at least his bishop on c7.

38 Rdd2 Qxa4 39 Be5 (the resistance would have been prolonged somewhat by 39 Kd1 Bxd2 40 Kxd2 Qe4! 41 Kc1 Qe1+ with the gradual advance of the kingside pawns) **39 ... Kh7 40 Bc3?!**

Also a typically human mistake! After 40 Bb2! Qe4 41 Kd1 Bxd2 42 Rxd2 g5 White could still have still have floundered on a little in a protracted, hopeless endgame. But in the time scramble Euwe did not see the difference between the two bishop moves.

40 ... Qb5!

This is the point: by preventing 41 Kd1 Black drives his opponent into a zugzwang! Now any move leads to loss of material.



41 Bd4

'If 41 Ba1, then 41 ... Qf1+ followed by ... Bg7+ etc..' (Alekhine) And in the event of 41 h4 the white pawns would have fallen after geometric manoeuvres by the black queen: 41 ... Qb6! 42 g3 Qd6! 43 Kb2 Qb8+! 44 Ka2 Bxd2 45 Rxd2 Qxg3 etc.

41 ... Qe2! 42 g4 Qe1+ 43 Kb2 Bxd2 44 Rc8

White's very first threat in this game (Rh8 mate!) almost produces a miracle: the automatic defence 44 ... g5?? leads to perpetual check: 45 Rh8+ Kg6 46 Rg8+ Kh6 47 Rh8+.

44 ... Bc1+! 0-1

The miracle did not occur! In view of 45 Rxc1 Qd2+ and ... Qxd4 White resigned. In my opinion, if you were to show the bare score of this game to some modern analyst, he would date it at roughly the late 1960s to the early 1970s.

The picture of the start is supplemented by Euwe's failure in the French Defence (½ out of 4), although it was not the opening that was to blame, but the character of the resulting positions. Sharp, open play with a smack of a certain irrationality had long been Alekhine's forte!

Game 142

A.Alekhine-M.Euwe

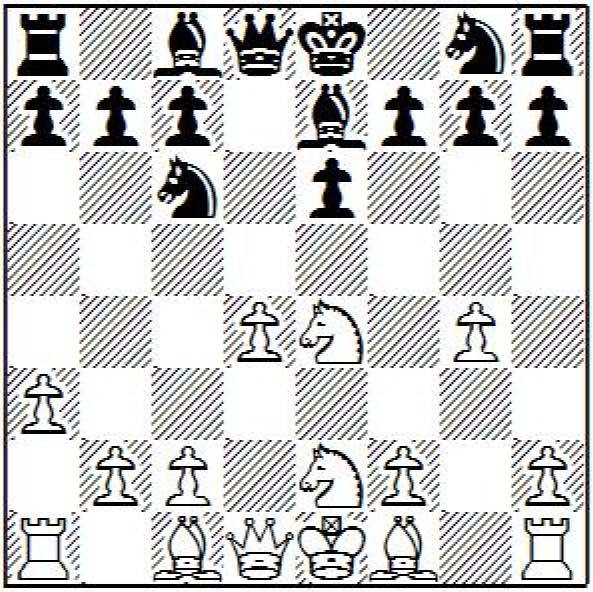
World Championship Match, Holland 1935, 7th game

French Defence C15

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 Ne2 dxe4 5 a3 Be7 (5 ... Bxc3+ – *Game No.139*) **6 Nxe4 Nc6! 7 g4?!**

An extremely dubious experiment! Some commentators called it ‘an underestimation of the opponent’, and others ‘a violation of Steinitz’s principles’.

The point is that the fifth game went 7 Be3 (7 c3 e5!) 7 ... Nf6 8 N2c3 (8 Nxf6+ Bxf6 9 Qd2 e5! is also level Lilienthal-Botvinnik, Moscow 1936) 8 ... 0-0 9 Ng3 b6 10 Be2 Bb7 11 0-0 Qd7 12 Qd2 Rad8 13 Rfd1 Qc8 with equal chances. And in the seventh game Alekhine decided, as he put it, ‘to try by force to hold on to the e4-square.’



7 ... b6?!

Panic! White’s gamble pays off! Both 7 ... e5 8 d5 Nd4 and 7 ... h5!? 8 g5 e5 (Botvinnik) suggest themselves, but the simplest was 7 ... Nf6! 8

Nxf6+ Bxf6 9 Be3 h5! (even better than 9 ... Qd5) 10 gxh5 Qd5, seizing the initiative.

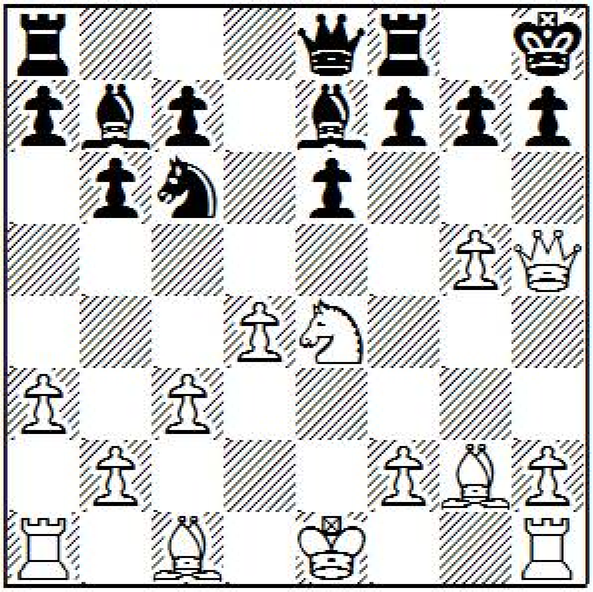
Was it this and similar occurrences that prompted Alekhine to make the devilish piece sacrifice in the sixth game of the return match (*Game No.143*)? Kotov made a subtle comment on the underlying psychological motive behind 7 g4?!: 'Euwe, while being an expert on known theoretical variations, was not always able to find quickly the correct reply to an unexpected, original move by the opponent.'

8 Bg2 Bb7 9 c3 Nf6 10 N2g3 0-0?!

Directly into mate! Had Euwe been able to calm down even slightly, he would have preferred 10 ... Qd7 followed by ... 0-0-0.

11 g5 Nxe4 12 Nxe4 Kh8 13 Qh5! (preventing 13 ... f5) **13 ... Qe8?!**

Persisting in his desire to play ... f7-f5 (if 13 ... f5?, then 14 g6). However, 13 ... Na5 was sounder – after this Euwe recommended 14 Bf4, but in my opinion interesting is 14 Rg1!? with the initiative.



14 Nf6!

This is Alekhine! On this occasion – a completely correct pawn sacrifice, giving White a strong initiative.

14 ... Bxf6

After 14 ... gxf6? 15 gxf6 Na5 (15 ... Bxf6 16 Be4!) there is 16 Bxb7 Nxb7 17 fxe7 Qxe7 18 Bg5 (18 Bf4!? Rg8 19 0-0-0 Tartakower) 18 ... f6 19

Bh6 Rg8 20 0-0-0 Nd6 21 Rhe1 (Alekhine).

15 gxf6 gxf6 16 Qh4 Qd8 (but not 16 ... Qe7? 17 Be4 winning) **17 Bf4!** and after a nervy struggle with errors by both sides, White won on the 40th move.

After the ninth game Alekhine was leading by 5-2 in wins, and after the 19th by 7-5. At the height of the match, sure of his success, he decided to prepare the ground for a trip to his native Moscow, where in 1936 a third major international tournament was being planned. To the indignation of Russian émigrés, the disgraced champion sent a congratulatory letter to the editorial board of the newspaper *64* (the editor-in-chief of which was that same Krylenko from Amsterdam):

'Not only as a chess player of many years' standing, but also as a person who understands the enormous significance of what has been achieved in the USSR in all aspects of cultural life, I send my sincere greetings to the chess players of the USSR on the 18th anniversary of the October Revolution. A. Alekhine.'

And yet Alekhine contrived to lose the crown! 'My visit to Moscow will have to be delayed,' he said sadly to Flohr (one of Euwe's assistants) after the match. 'I want to go there only as world champion.' And, as he left Holland, he declared: 'Nothing terrible has happened. We will consider that I have loaned the title ... for two years!' Fortunately for Alekhine and for chess, the match agreement stipulated the right of the champion to a return match ...

But for the moment the overthrown king rushed into a crucible of chess battles – but with mixed success: already the inexorable tread of the new generation was being heard. In Bad Nauheim 1936 he shared first place with the 20-year-old Estonian Paul Keres (6½ out of 9), then took first prize in Dresden (6½ out of 9), stumbled in Podebrady (1. Flohr – 13 out of 17; 2. Alekhine – 12½) and occupied the altogether uncustomary sixth place in the strongest tournament of those times – Nottingham 1936, where he lost by blundering against Capablanca (and also with an unpleasant squabble at the adjournment: who should seal the move?!), was defeated by the 24-year-old USA champion Reshevsky, and played a 'nervy' draw with Botvinnik ... The only consolation was a special prize 'for the most brilliant kingside attack' in his game with Alexander and a win over Euwe.

However, the current world champion gained his revenge in Amsterdam 1936, and as a result again finished half a point ahead of his main opponent. The ex-champion revived in Hastings 1936/37 (1. Alekhine – 8 out of 9; 2. Flohr – 7½), but after this came disappointing results in Margate, Kemeri and Bad Nauheim 1937, where the fourth champion again lost to the fifth.

In a word, at the start of the Euwe-Alekhine return match (Holland, 5 October-7 December 1937) the forecasts were in favour of the 36-year-old Dutchman, who was also himself confident of victory. And indeed, Alekhine had always had difficulty playing against Euwe, beginning with their match of 1926/27 – and here he also appeared to have lost his form. The match was again to a maximum of 30 games, and from the very start, as was expected, Euwe took the lead: 1-0, 3-2.

The turning point in the match began with the staggering sixth game. This is probably one of the most vivid demonstrations not only of Alekhine's unrestrained imagination, but also his psychological aggression.

Game 143

A.Alekhine-M.Euwe

World Championship Return Match, Holland 1937, 6th game

Slav Defence D10

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3

'In my opinion this move gives White more chances of obtaining an opening advantage.' (Alekhine)

3 ... dxc4 (3 ... e5 and 3 ... Nf6 are also quite playable) **4 e4! e5**

According to Alekhine, White has the advantage after 4 ... b5 5 a4 b4 6 Na2 Nf6 7 e5 Nd5 8 Bxc4 (for example: Kasparov-I. Sokolov, Sarajevo 2000) or 5 ... e5 6 axb5!? (quieter is 6 Nf3 exd4 7 Qxd4 Qxd4 8 Nxd4 b4 9 Nd1 Kasparov-Hübner, Belfort 1988) 6 ... exd4 7 Bxc4! Bb4! (7 ... dxc3 8 Bxf7+! Ke7 9 Qb3 Nf6 10 e5 Ne4 11 bxc3) 8 Ra4 a5 9 bxa6 'and White will emerge a pawn to the good.' (Alekhine) Say, 9 ... c5 10 Ne2 Nxa6 11 0-0 dxc3 12 Bxf7+ Ke7 13 Qxd8+ Kxd8 14 bxc3 etc.

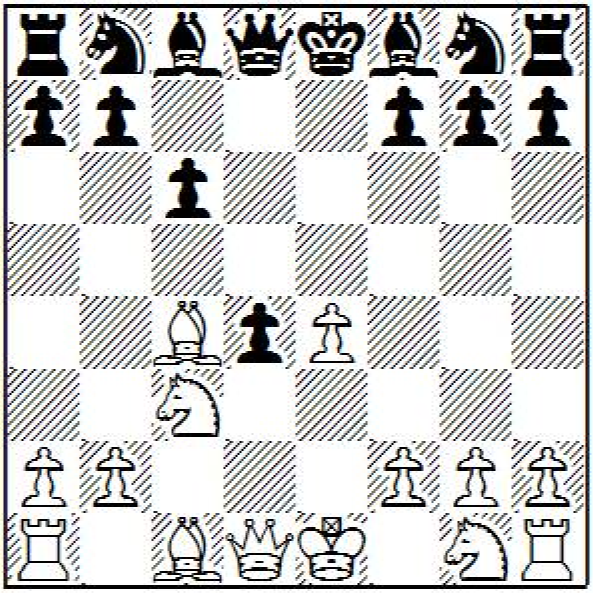
5 Bxc4?

‘This combination is certainly very tempting and, especially over the board, very difficult to refute; but ... the positional exploitation of White’s advantage in space consists in 5 Nf3! exd4 6 Qxd4 Qxd4 7 Nxd4, after which Black would only get into further trouble by trying to protect the gambit-pawn – for instance, 7 ... b5 8 a4 b4 9 Nd1 Ba6 10 Be3 Nf6 11 f3 followed by Rc1 and Bxc4 with a clear positional advantage.’ (Alekhine)

In the aforementioned game with Hübner, which reached the same position by a transposition of moves, I played 10 Bf4!? Nf6 11 f3 Bc5 12 Nf5 0-0 13 Rc1 and after 13 ... c3! 14 bxc3 g6 15 Ng3 Nfd7! Black succeeded in defending.

5 ... exd4

Bad is 5 ... Qxd4? 6 Qb3 Qd7 7 Bg5! and Rd1 with a decisive attack.



6 Nf3!!?

A fantastic move, which, perhaps, won ... the match! White simply leaves a piece en prise! Such an idea could only have been thought up by Alekhine – a person who on a new level processed and whirled around in his mind all the ideas of the masters from the past.

‘Putting before Black a most difficult practical problem.’ (Alekhine) But objectively, it most probably loses ...

6 ... b5?

The worst of the possible replies! ‘My “chief” variation was the following: 6 ... dxc3 7 Bxf7+ Ke7 8 Qb3 Nf6 9 e5 Ne4 10 0-0! Qb6 (or 10 ... Na6 11 Qc4! Nac5 12 Bg5+! Nxg5 13 Nxg5 with a winning attack) 11 Qc4! cxb2 (*11 ... Bf5 12 Nh4 – G. K.*) 12 Bxb2 Qxb2 13 Qxe4 Kxf7 14 Ng5+ Ke8 15 Qc4 Be7 16 Qf7+ Kd8 17 Rad1+ Bd7 18 Ne6+ Kc8 19 Qxe7 Qxe5 20 Rfe1 Qf6 (*far more tenacious is 20 ... Qa5! 21 Nc5 Rd8 22 Ne4 etc. – G. K.*) 21 Rxd7 Qxe7 (21 ... Nxd7 22 Qd6) 22 Rxe7 with a won position.

‘But, instead of 8 ... Nf6 Black could play 8 ... cxb2! 9 Bxb2 Qb6! 10 Bxg8 Rxg8 11 Qxg8 Qb4+ 12 Nd2 Qxb2, after which his middlegame chances, in spite of the approximate equality of forces, should be estimated decidedly higher than White’s remaining possibilities of a direct attack.’ (Alekhine)

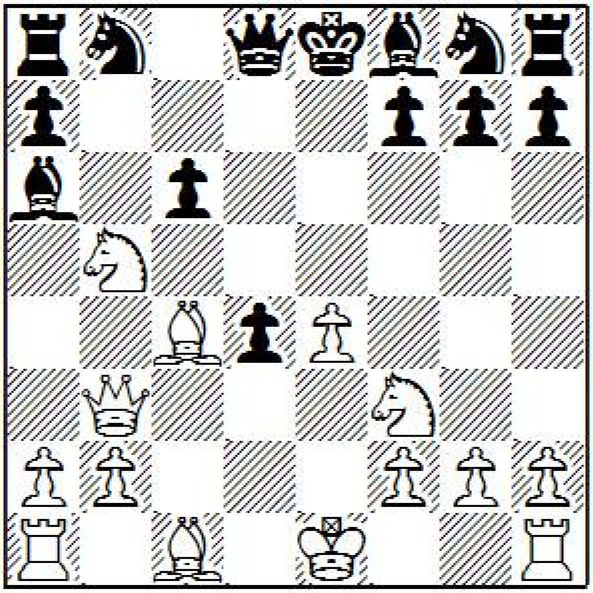
Black also has a great advantage after 11 Ba3+ c5, as shown by an analysis by Goncharov in the newspaper *64* (1938): 12 Qxg8 Qa5+ 13 Nd2 Qxa3 14 0-0 Nc6 15 Qxh7 Be6 or 12 Bxc5+ Qxc5 13 0-0 Qh5!! (but not 13 ... Rh8? 14 Rfc1 Qb6 15 Rxc8 Qxb3 16 axb3) 14 Qxg8?! Be6 15 Qh8 Nc6.

A computer verification confirms the correctness of these variations. But Euwe did not find them. He was obviously in a state of shock, since, after spending a mass of time, he immediately made a losing move. After all, if the worst came to the worst it was possible to play 6 ... Bc5 7 0-0! dxc3 (somewhat inferior is 7 ... Nf6 8 Na4 Be7 9 e5 Nd5 10 Nxd4 0-0 11 Nc3) 8 Bxf7+ Ke7 9 Qb3 cxb2 10 Bxb2 Nf6 and Black is alright.

7 Nxb5

‘Dr Euwe admits simply having overlooked this reply. This time the knight obviously cannot be taken because of 8 Bd5 etc.’ (Alekhine)

7 ... Ba6 8 Qb3!



At a stroke White defends his bishop, prevents the check at b4, and attacks f7.

8 ... Qe7

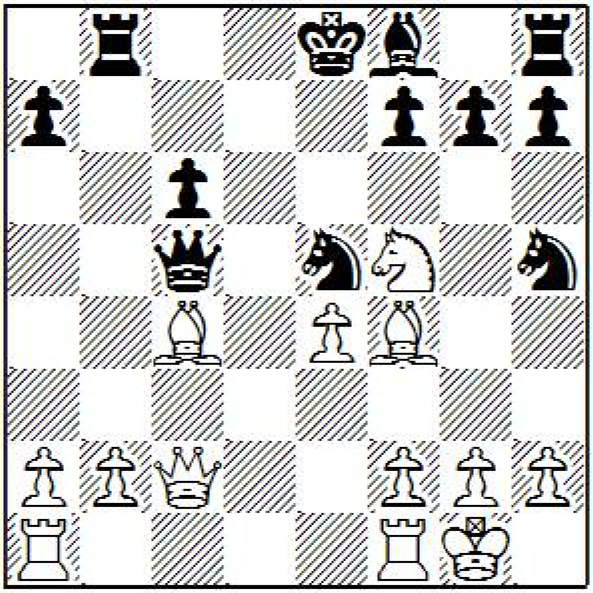
‘If 8 ... Bxb5 then 9 Bxf7+ Kd7 10 Nxd4! (not 10 Bxg8? Rxg8) etc. with an easy win.’ (Alekhine) Essentially, the battle is this game was already over by the eighth move: White is a pawn up with a strong attack. Euwe drags out the resistance, most probably merely to ease his conscience.

9 0-0 Bxb5 10 Bxb5 Nf6 (but not 10 ... cxb5? 11 Qd5) **11 Bc4 Nbd7 12 Nxd4! Rb8 13 Qc2 Qc5 14 Nf5** (14 Nxc6? Rc8) **14 ... Ne5 15 Bf4!**

Avoiding a trap: 15 Nxg7+? Kd8! 16 Rd1+ Kc7 and there are two white pieces en prise.

15 ... Nh5

And this allows a little combination, which relieves Black’s sufferings.



16 Bxf7+! Kxf7 17 Qxc5 Bxc5 18 Bxe5 Rb5 (or 18 ... Rbe8 19 Bd6) **19 Bd6** (with the threat of 20 a4) **19 ... Bb6 20 b4!**

‘And now the rook is in danger. Black cannot avoid further loss of material.’ (Alekhine)

20 ... Rd8 21 Rad1 c5 22 bxc5 Bxc5 23 Rd5! 1-0

Also winning at least the exchange.

Not a bad piece of preparation: one knight move – and Euwe was finished! The whole point is that Alekhine was able to climb to heights that were unknown to his opponent: this was a level of chess from the second half or even the end of the 20th century. It was this violent activity, this furious onslaught right from the opening that constituted Alekhine’s real strength!

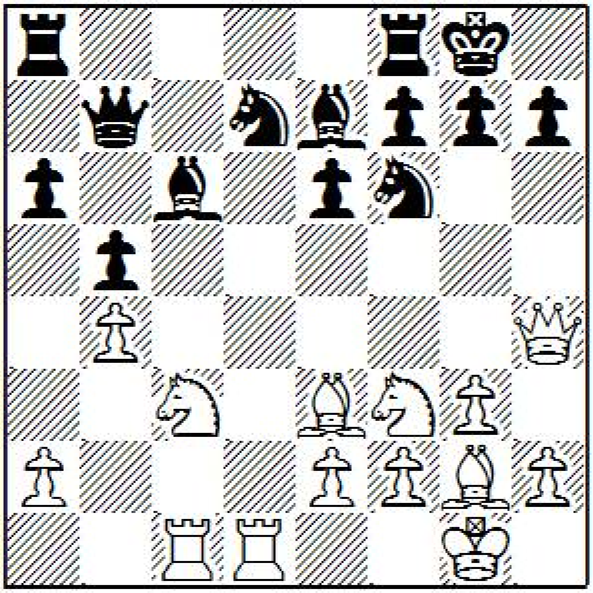
The stunned Euwe then lost the seventh and eighth games, and after a draw in the ninth he also lost the 10th. The outcome of the return match was decided ... The Dutchman held on as best he could, but he was unable to recover fully from the heavy blow that he received in the sixth game. Whereas Alekhine displayed the inventiveness that had been lost at the end of the first match, but he played more accurately, with a smaller degree of risk. Although he complicated the play, it was not at any price; he sacrificed, but in moderation – he maintained the tension, not allowing his opponent any obvious positional pluses. And if he did overstep the mark, he didn't lose control of the situation, and didn't go to extremes, as in the matches of 1934 and 1935. I think that this balanced play by Alekhine also affected Euwe: his opponent was much better prepared for the match than he expected.

Nevertheless the struggle from 11th-20th games was still very tense. In addition, fatigue took its toll – the players again, like two years earlier, travelled right round the country: The Hague – Rotterdam – Harlem – Groningen – Amsterdam ...

Game 144

A.Alekhine-M.Euwe

World Championship Return Match, Holland 1937, 16th game



18 Rxd7! Bxd7 (18 ... Qxd7? 19 Ne5) **19 Ng5 Qb8 20 Bxa8 Qxa8 21 Nxh7! Rc8!**

After 21 ... Nd5 22 Ng5 Bxg5 23 Bxg5 White is simply a healthy pawn to the good.

22 Ng5

It is not clear whether it would have been more advantageous to play 22 Bc5!? Bxc5 23 Nxf6+ gxf6 24 Qg4+ Kh8 25 bxc5 Rxc5 26 Qd4 Qc6 27 Qxf6+ Kg8 28 a3 e5.

22 ... Rc4! 23 Nce4 Rxc1+

Not wishing to fight for a draw by 23 ... Rxe4 24 Nxe4 Qxe4 25 Qxe4 Nxe4 26 Rc7 Nf6 with a knight and bishop against an active enemy rook.

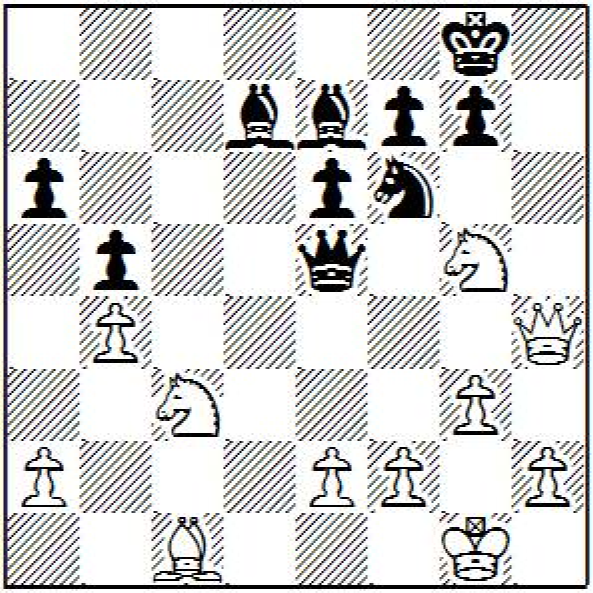
24 Bxc1 Qd5 25 Nc3

25 Nxf6+?! would have been a blank shot – 25 ... Bxf6 26 Qh7+ Kf8 27 Be3 Qd1+ 28 Kg2 Bc6+ 29 Nf3 Qxe2 30 Bc5+ Ke8 31 Qg8+ Kd7 32 Qxf7+ Kc8 with an equal game.

25 ... Qe5?

Of course, essential was 25 ... Qc4! 26 Qxc4 bxc4 27 a3 Nd5 with real chances of saving the game. Here Alekhine sank into lengthy thought ...

According to Euwe, ‘The 16th game went down in history as a “comedy of errors”: for almost a whole hour, during which the players each made two moves, Alekhine could have carried out a winning combination. It was seen by the entire audience, who waited with bated breath, but it was not noticed by either him or me.’



26 Bb2?

Inconceivable! After the elementary 26 Qh8+! Kxh8 27 Nxf7+ Kg8 28 Nxe5 Bxb4 29 Nxd7 Nxd7 (29 ... Bxc3 30 Nc5) 30 Ne4 White has a won minor piece endgame.

Incidentally, White won with a similar classic stroke in the well-known game Petrosian-Spassky (Moscow 10th matchgame 1966), which we will analyse in the second volume.

26 ... Bc6??

A unique case of mutual blindness. The queen should have been urgently moved from the mined square – 26 ... Qf5!

27 a3??

Fantastic: here 27 Qh8+! Kxh8 28 Nxf7+ Kg8 29 Nxe5 would have forced immediate capitulation!

27 ... Bd6 28 e3 Qf5 29 e4 Qg6 30 f3 Nd7 31 Nh3 f6 32 Nf4 Qf7 33 Qg4?! (finally losing hopes of converting the extra pawn) **33 ... Ne5! 34 Qxe6 Nxf3+ 35 Kf2 Qxe6 36 Nxe6 Nd2 37 Nd4 Nxe4+** with a draw on the 65th move.

'A fortunate draw is more than the salvaging of a half point,' writes Euwe. 'For me it was as though the start of a new match, and I made a last attempt to retain my title.'

By winning the 17th game, the champion reduced the deficit to '-2' and in this part of the match the key game became the 18th, in which a present-day *tabiya* in the Tarrasch Defence Deferred was tested for the first time.

Game 145

A.Alekhine-M.Euwe

World Championship Return Match, Holland 1937, 18th game

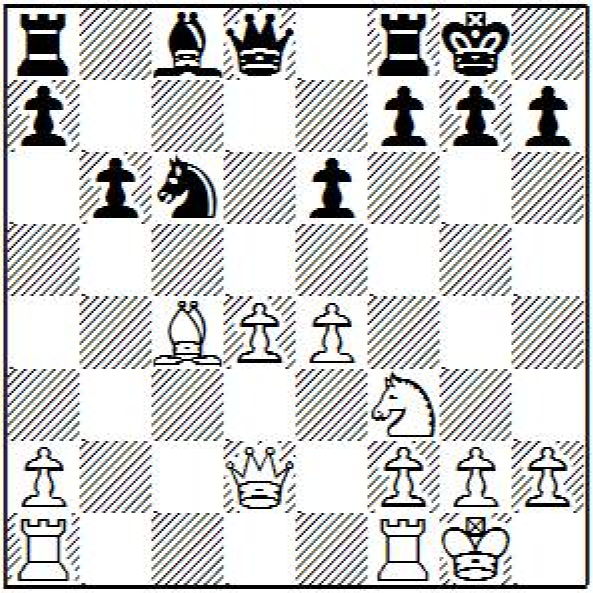
Queen's Gambit D41

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 d4 Nf6 4 Nc3 c5 5 cxd5 Nxd5 6 e4 Nxc3 7 bxc3 cxd4 8 cxd4 Bb4+

After 8 ... Nc6 9 Bc4 b5?! (Spassky-Fischer, Reykjavik 9th matchgame 1972) the best is considered to be 10 Be2!

9 Bd2 Bxd2+ (passive is 9 ... Qa5?! 10 Rb1! Bxd2+ 11 Qxd2 Qxd2+ 12 Kxd2 as in Rubinstein-Schlechter, San Sebastian 1912) **9 Bd2 Bxd2+ 10**

Qxd2 0-0 11 Bc4 Nc6 12 0-0 b6



13 Rfd1

In the chapter on the 10th world champion we will examine 13 Rad1! (Spassky-Petrosian 5th matchgame 1960).

13 ... Bb7

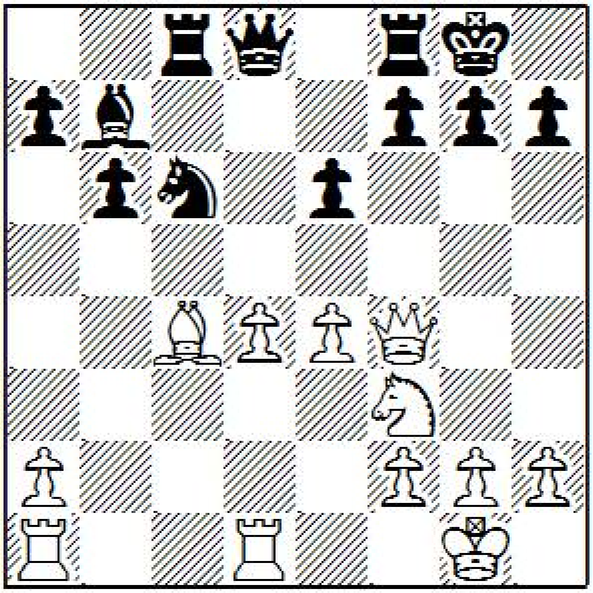
Also possible is 13 ... Na5 14 Bd3 Bb7, as Korchnoi and Polugayevsky played in the 1960s. But 13 ... Ne7 is strongly met by 14 a4! Bb7 15 Bd3 Ng6 16 a5 (16 g3!?) 16 ... Nh4 17 Nxh4 Qxh4 18 Qe3 Rfd8 19 Rab1 Rd6 20 e5! (Petrosian-Portisch, Skopje Olympiad 1972).

14 Qf4

Before this the line 14 Qe2 Qe7 15 Ba6 Bxa6 16 Qxa6 f5! equalising had been tried (Teichmann-Rubinstein, Berlin 1924), and after it – both 14 Qe3 and 14 Rac1!? Rc8 15 d5 exd5 16 Bxd5.

14 ... Rc8

Perhaps rather more solid is 14 ... Qf6!? 15 Qe3 Rfd8 16 e5 Qh6! with equal chances (Reshevsky-Fine, Hastings 1937/38) or 16 Rac1 Rac8 (Yudovich-Averbakh, Moscow 1949).



15 d5 exd5 16 Bxd5 Qe7 17 Ng5!?

Again typical Alekhine aggression: the triple capture on f7 is threatened, followed by Rd7+ and Rxb7. If 17 Nh4, then simply 17 ... g6.

17 ... Ne5! (an attractive tactical trick) **18 Bxb7**

Alekhine considered this a mistake, since he had missed Black’s 20th move. He recommended 18 h4, ‘maintaining an appreciable pressure’, but it is not clear to me what White pressure there is to speak of after 18 ... h6! For example: 19 Bxb7 (19 Nh3?! Ng6!; 19 Nf3 Nxf3+, 20 ... Bxd5 etc.) 19 ... hxg5 (19 ... Ng6!?) 20 Qxg5 Qxb7 21 Qxe5 Rfe8 22 Qd5 Qe7 with level chances.

18 ... Ng6 19 Qf5 Qxb7 20 Rd7 Qa6!

Clever, although it is not obviously bad to play 20 ... Rc7 21 Rad1 Rxd7 (21 ... h6!?) 22 Rxd7 Qa6 or 22 ... Qc8.

21 h4

It turns out that if 21 Rxf7 Euwe had prepared 21 ... Qxa2! 22 Rxf8+ Nxf8 ‘and White’s attack has evaporated, whereas Black’s queenside pawns are very dangerous.’ (Kotov) Although, in my view, after 23 Re1 the play is still double-edged.

21 ... Rc5 22 Rd5 Rxd5?

A mistake in an equal position: why give the opponent a strong passed pawn in the centre? Of course, correct was 22 ... Qc8 23 Rxc5 Qxc5 24

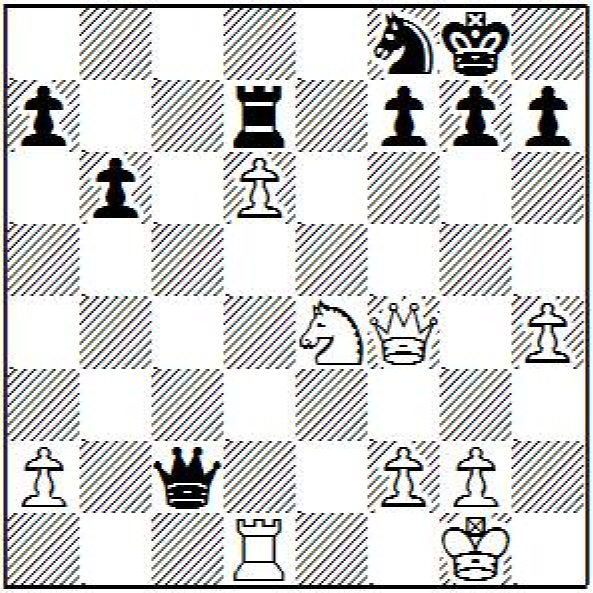
Qxc5 bxc5 25 Rc1 Rc8 equalising.

23 exd5 Qc8 24 Qe4 Re8 25 Qa4!

A double attack, enabling White to advance his passed pawn.

25 ... Re7 26 d6 Rd7 27 Rd1 (with the threat of h4-h5-h6) **27 ... Nf8 28 Qf4?!** (Alekhine rightly thought that the quiet 28 g3! was better) **28 ... Qc6 29 Ne4 Qc2**

The game enters the phase of time-trouble 'turbulence'.



30 Rc1?

Why give up the pawn? It is true that 30 Rd2 does not look right, but for some reason none of the commentators pointed out the simple move 30 Re1!, and 30 ... Qxa2? is not possible in view of 31 Nf6+! gxf6 32 Qg4+ Kh8 33 Re8 Qa1+ 34 Kh2 Qe5+ 35 Rxe5 fxe5 36 Qf5 with an obvious plus. A nuance overlooked by the whole chess community! With material equal, White would still have retained definite chances of success, thanks to his powerful passed pawn.

30 ... Qxa2 31 h5

'The beginning of an elaborate plan which eventually throws away the win. The logical and correct way was 31 Rc8, which I rejected because of the following consideration: Black will answer 31 ... Qe6 with the threat of 32 ... f5. This consideration was entirely erroneous, as after, for instance, 32 Ra8! Black's 32 ... f5 could be met by one of two methods: 33 f3, and even more effectively 33 Ng5 Qxd6 34 Qc4+ Qd5 35 Ne6! and wins. After 31 Rc8 almost all the black pieces would be immobilised and the actual winning procedure for White, therefore, merely a matter of technique.' (Alekhine)

However, instead of 33 ... Qxd6? much stronger is Botvinnik's suggestion of 33 ... Qd5!, winning the d6-pawn (and the game): 34 Rb8 Qd1+ 35 Kh2 Qxd6.

Therefore 32 Rb8 is better, but even then, according to Botvinnik, Black has an acceptable defence: 32 ... f5 33 Ng5 Qxd6 (*? – G. K.*) 34 Qc4+ Qd5 35 Ne6 Qd1+ 36 Kh2 Qd6+ 37 g3 Qxb8. In turn, Kotov suggests 35 Qxd5+! Rxd5 36 Ne6 Kf7 37 Nxf8 h6 38 h5 f4 39 Ng6 'and White should be able to convert his material advantage, although this involves considerable technical difficulties.' But in my opinion, here too after 33 ... Qd5! it is hard to offer White any good advice (34 Nxh7?! Kxh7 35 Rxf8 Qd1+ 36 Kh2 Qxd6 wins for Black).

31 ... h6 32 Ng3 (32 Rc8!? Alekhine) **32 ... Ne6 33 Qe5 Qa6 34 Nf5 Qd3 35 Kh2**

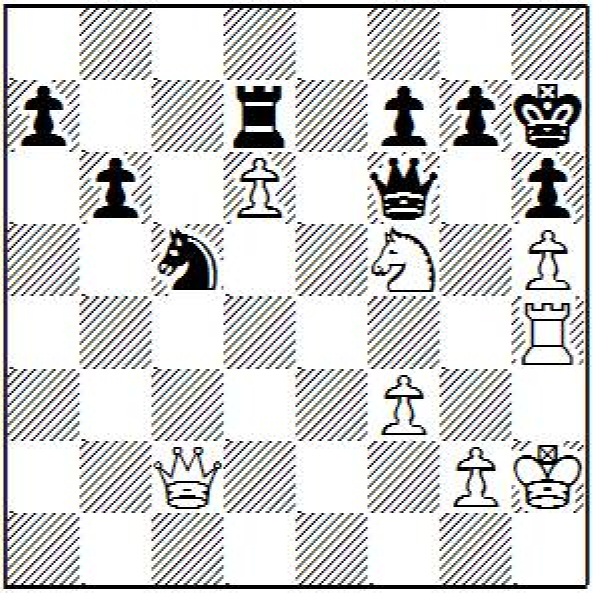
White is not satisfied with either the fight for a draw by 35 Rc8+ Kh7 36 Nxh6!? (Kotov), nor even an immediate draw after 35 Nxh6+ gxh6 36 Rc8+ Rd8 37 Rxd8+ Nxd8 38 Qe8+ Kg7 39 Qxd8 (Alekhine, Botvinnik).

35 ... Kh7 36 Rc3 Qd1 37 f3 Qd2 38 Rc4 Qg5 39 Rh4?

Having achieved a drawn position, Alekhine tries to play for a win and, as often happens, himself ends up on the verge of defeat. After 39 Rg4! Qxh5+ 40 Rh4 Qg6 41 Rg4 Black would have had to agree to a repetition of moves (41 ... Qh5+ 42 Rh4), since both 41 ... Qf6? 42 Rxg7+ and 41 ... Ng5? 42 f4 f6 43 Qb5 are bad.' (Kotov)

39 ... Qf6 40 Qe4 Nc5 41 Qc2

Here the game was adjourned and Euwe sealed his move. White has a rather unpleasant position.



41 ... a5?!

‘A careful examination of the possibilities for both sides brought me to the conclusion that the most promising one for Black was the seemingly less aggressive one: 41 ... Kh8 42 g3 (best) 42 ... Rd8! 43 Rg4 Rg8, after which he would threatens to advance his a-pawn with decisive effect. Still, Black’s next move did not surprise me, as I had analysed it, both when played at once and also after 41 ... Kh8 42 g3.’ (Alekhine)

42 g3!

‘This safety measure is necessary in all variations.’ (Alekhine) Subsequently too White plays very resourcefully during the resumption, all the time finding the best moves.

42 ... a4

More venomous was Alekhine’s suggestion of 42 ... Kh8 43 Rg4 a4 (*no better is 43 ... Rd8 44 Rxg7 Nb7 45 Rg4 Nxd6 46 Rf4 – G. K.*) 44 Rxg7 a3 45 Rg4! Rd8 (if 45 ... Qb2, then 46 Qxb2+ axb2 47 Rb4) 46 Rf4 a2 (or 46 ... Nd3 47 Qxd3 a2 48 Ra4) 47 Qxa2 Nd3 48 Qc4 Nxf4 49 Qxf4 and 50 g4 with a draw thanks to the knight-marvel on f5.

43 Rg4

‘The first move of the saving combination which I was lucky enough to find over the board after about half an hour of anxiety. One of the points of Black’s previous move was that White could not play here the tempting

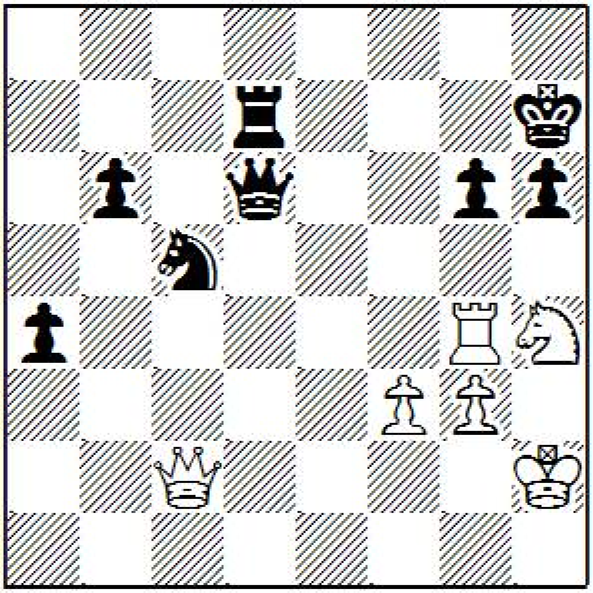
43 Ne7+ Kh8 44 Rxa4 because of the winning reply 44 ... Qxf3!' (Alekhine)

43 ... g6 (useless is 43 ... a3 44 Nxg7+ Kh8 45 Nf5 with sufficient counterplay) **44 Nh4!** (but not 44 hxg6+? fxg6 45 Nh4 Rg7) **44 ... Qxd6**

A draw would have resulted from 44 ... a3 45 hxg6+ fxg6 46 Nxg6 Qb2 47 Nf8+ Kh8 48 Ng6+, since 48 ... Kg8? is bad because of 49 Ne5+! Rg7 50 Qxb2 axb2 51 Rb4.

45 hxg6+ fxg6

The culmination of the game and to a considerable degree of the entire match.



46 Rd4!!

One of those thunderous Alekhine surprises! The capture of the rook leads to perpetual check (46 ... Qxd4 47 Qxg6+ Kh8 48 Qe8+). I think that this stroke must have staggered Euwe. In this match he was all the time experiencing something of a psychological shock, because his opponent kept finding moves that were beyond his understanding ...

46 ... Qe6 47 Rxd7+ Nxd7 48 Qxa4 h5 49 Qc2 Ne5 50 Kg2! (another trap!) **50 ... Nc4?**

Black falls into it. 50 ... Qc4! was correct – here, according to Alekhine, 51 Qd2 Qc5 52 f4 Qc6+ 53 Kg1 Nf3+ 54 Nxf3 Qxf3 55 Qe1 would have given White significant drawing chances. He also has counterplay after 53 ... Ng4 54 Qa2 Qc1+ (54 ... Kh6 55 Qb2) 55 Kg2 Kh6 56 Nf3. But in either case the position would still have been not altogether clear: Black is a pawn up! And I don't know how the game would have ended, if the two players had exchanged colours ...

51 Nxg6! ½-½

A check for a check, a queen for a queen: 51 ... Ne3+ 52 Kf2 Nxc2 53 Nf8+ and 54 Nxe6. Draw!

'This game was the turning point in the match,' considers Alekhine. 'By not winning it, Euwe lost most of his chances of retaining the title of world champion.' Most, but not yet all! 'I missed a clear win in the 19th game,' writes Euwe, 'and excellent chances in the 20th. The score became 11-9. And here, just as the 21st game of the first match became Alekhine's "Sedan", so the same numbered game in the return match became my "Sedan" ... The difference in the scores again grew to three points.'

But the match was finally settled by the amazing and, I would say, legendary 22nd game, in which Alekhine's knight leaped around the entire board, in the end forcing his weary opponent to resign. Although, as computer analysis shows, he was not bound to lose ...

Game 146

A.Alekhine-M.Euwe

World Championship Return Match, Holland 1937, 22nd game

Réti Opening A09

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 (as bequeathed by Réti) **2 ... d4** (I should remind you that Lasker played 2 ... c6 – *Game No.71*) **3 e3**

After 3 b4 Black has time to support his d4-pawn by 3 ... f6 4 e3 e5.

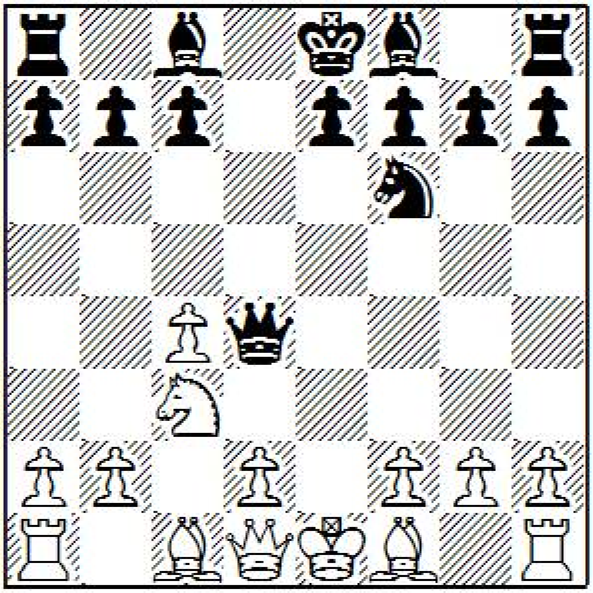
3 ... Nc6

'After 3 ... c5 4 b4 f6 White can play not 5 bxc5 e5! with about even chances, but 5 exd4 cxd4 6 c5! (this last move, which appears very effective, was discovered by myself when preparing for the match) after which the weakness of the diagonal a2-g8 would cause Black considerable trouble. If 6 ... e5, then 7 Bc4; if 6 ... Qd5, then 7 Qc2 (*or 7 Bb5!? Nc6 8 d3*

– *G. K.*); if 6 ... a5, then 7 Qa4+ Bd7 8 b5 e5 9 Bc4 and Black cannot play 9 ... Bxc5 because of 10 Bxg8 followed by 11 Qc4.' (Alekhine) There only remains 9 ... Nh6 10 Ba3! etc.

4 exd4 Nxd4 5 Nxd4 Qxd4 6 Nc3 Nf6

Alekhine recommended 6 ... Bg4, but here Black has to reckon with 7 Qa4+! (Keres-Euwe, Noordwijk 1938). 6 ... e5 7 d3 Ne7 has also been played, but nowadays the height of fashion is 6 ... c6 7 d3 Nh6!?

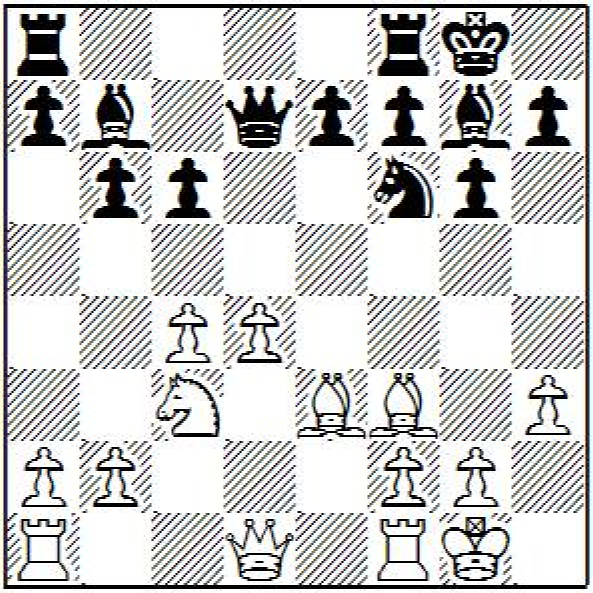


7 d3 (pointless is 7 Nb5?! Qb6 8 d4 Ne4! 9 c5 Qc6 10 Nc3 a6 equalising) **7 ... c6?**

'A serious loss of time, instead of which 7 ... e5 was quite sufficient. If then 8 Be3, simply 8 ... Qd8 9 d4 Ng4; or if 9 Be2, then 9 ... c5 (or even, more solid, 9 ... Be7) with an approximately equal game.' (Alekhine)

8 Be3 Qd7 9 d4 g6 10 Be2 Bg7 (there was no point in playing 10 ... Ng4?! 11 Bf4 Bg7 12 h3) **11 h3 0-0 12 0-0 b6 13 Bf3 Bb7**

'The game is completely equal.' (Kotov) Nothing of the sort: as a result of Black's inaccuracy on the seventh move he has emerged from the opening with a rather passive position.



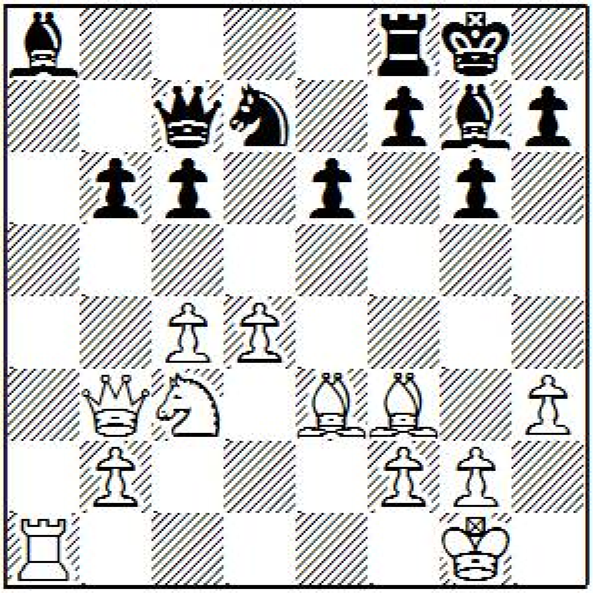
14 a4!

‘In order to make a break in the centre more effective White tries first to weaken Black’s b6.’ (Alekhine) Well, this is one of the possible plans.

14 ... Rad8

‘Almost a sad necessity since after a4-a5 Black will have to deal with the threat of a5-a6; while, on the other hand, after the exchange on b6 he will be obliged to offer the exchange of at least one pair of rooks.’ (Alekhine)

15 a5 Qc7 16 Qb3 Nd7 17 axb6 axb6 18 Ra7 Ra8 (19 d5 was threatened) **19 Rfa1 e6** (otherwise d4-d5 would be even more unpleasant) **20 Rxa8 Bxa8**



According to Alekhine, after 20 ... Rxa8 21 Rxa8+ Bxa8 22 Qa3 Bb7 23 b4 ‘White would have to face a technically easier problem than in the actual game.’ But I think it was precisely here that Euwe would have held on ...

21 d5!

This sudden breakthrough is a combination of strategy and tactics, typical of the fourth world champion! ‘This is the only possibility of taking advantage of the weakness of Black’s b6, created by the advance of White’s a-pawn. White has no means of improving the excellent position of his pieces.’ (Alekhine)

21 ... cxd5 22 cxd5 Nc5

It transpires that if 22 ... Bxc3? White had prepared 23 d6!! Qxd6 24 Qxc3 Bxf3 25 Bh6! winning the exchange, while if 22 ... Ne5, then 23 Be4 with the threat of d5-d6.

‘But a slightly better move was possible. After 22 ... exd5! Euwe would have had every justification to count on equality.’ (Kotov) ‘Black should have been able to gain a draw by 22 ... exd5 23 Bxd5 Bxc3 24 bxc3 Bxd5 25 Qxd5 Qxc3 26 Rc1 Nf6 27 Qd6 Qb2.’ (Botvinnik) However, in my view, stronger is 23 Nxd5! Bxd5 24 Bxd5 with a clear advantage.

23 Qc4 (but not 23 Bxc5?! Qxc5 24 dxe6 Bxf3 25 exf7+ Rxf7 26 gxf3 Bxc3 27 Ra7 Qg5+ with perpetual check) **23 ... exd5 24 Bxd5 Bxd5?!**

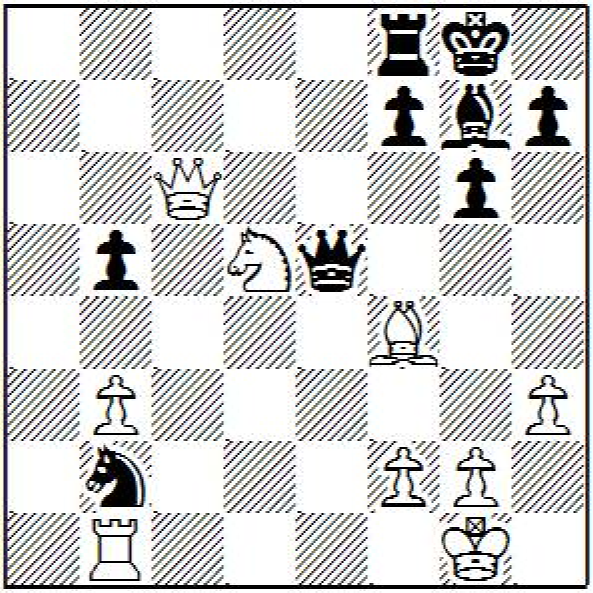
No one has commented on this move, but in my opinion it is an indifferent one and Black should have played 24 ... Bxc3!? 25 bxc3 Bxd5 26 Qxd5 Ne6 with a slightly inferior (weak dark squares), but solid position – objectively things are closer to a draw.

25 Nxd5 Qe5!?

‘Black selects the most aggressive line, which is certainly more promising than the purely passive 25 ... Qb7 26 Rb1 Nd7 27 Qb5! with a clear advantage in space for White.’ (Alekhine)

26 Rb1 Na4! 27 b3 Nb2 28 Qc6 b5! 29 Bf4!

Euwe was hoping to create counterplay, for example after 29 Bc5 (29 Qxb5? Rd8 wins for Black) 29 ... Rd8 30 Ne7+ Kh8 31 Qxb5 Qe4! 32 Rf1 Nd3. But now it transpires that this entire venture was rather dangerous for Black.



29 ... Qe6?

‘The only adequate defence consisted in 29 ... Qe2!, which would be answered by 30 Rf1! still leaving Black with the following weak spots: the b5-pawn; the square f6; last but not least, the insecure position of the knight at b2.’ (Alekhine) I would have played 30 Bg3! The knight at d5 is very strong, but it is not clear how serious White’s advantage is – after, say, 30 ... Qd3 31 Re1 Qxb3 32 Bd6! he unexpectedly begins an attack.

30 Qxb5 (now he can simply pick up a pawn) **30 ... Qe4**

‘If 30 ... Rd8, then 31 Rc1! Rxd5 32 Qb8+ (this is why 29 Bf4 was necessary) 32 ... Bf8 33 Bh6 Qd6 (or 33 ... Qe7 34 Rc8) 34 Qxd6 Rxd6 35 Rc8 and wins.’ (Alekhine)

31 Rc1 Nd3 (31 ... Rd8 32 Bg5!) **32 Qc4! Qe2** (of course, not 32 ... Bd4?? 33 Nf6+) **33 Rf1 Nxf4** (33 ... Re8 34 Be3!) **34 Qxf4**

Inferior is 34 Nxf4? Qxc4 35 bxc4 Rc8 36 Rc1 Bh6 with a draw. Now too Black has some counterplay for the pawn (a long-range bishop!), and the only question is how successfully he can resist. It is not easy for White to win, with or without the queens – I saved a similar endgame with a c-pawn against Geller (47th USSR Championship, Minsk 1979). But a b-pawn is nevertheless more remote, which is worse for the defending side.

34 ... Qb5 35 Qf3! (35 Qc4?! Rb8 is inaccurate) **35 ... Rb8 36 Rb1 Qa6 37 Rd1?!**

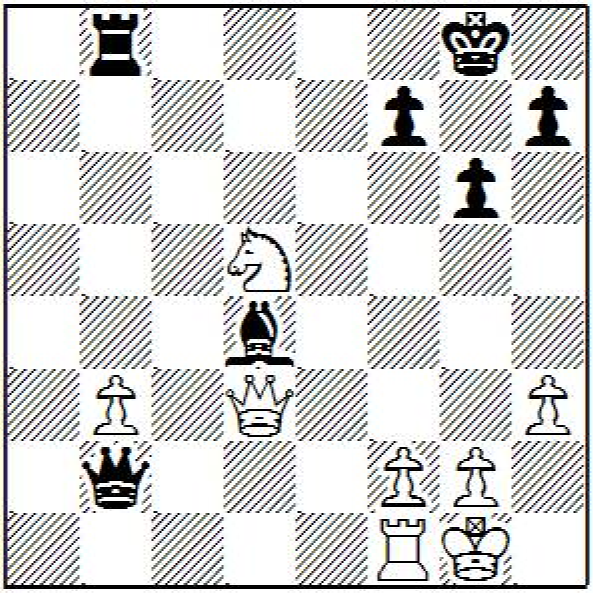
‘This attempt to repeat moves, due to a slight shortage of time, leads to extremely interesting complications. After the simple 37 b4 White would not have much trouble in taking advantage from the possession of a passed pawn. For instance, 37 ... Qc4 38 Ne7+ Kf8 39 Nc6 Rb6 40 b5! Rxb5 41 Qa3+ and wins.’ (Alekhine)

37 ... Qa3 38 Rb1 Qa2 (after 38 ... Bb2 39 b4 Qxf3 40 gxf3 it is not possible to play 40 ... Bd4? because of 41 Ne7+ Kf8 42 Nc6) **39 Qd3 Bd4**

Interesting counterplay against the f2-pawn. ‘This counterattack only compromises Black’s king’s position. But it is difficult to suggest a satisfactory line of play, for White is threatening simply to advance his passed pawn.’ (Alekhine)

40 Rf1 Qb2!?

A strong manoeuvre: if 40 ... Qa7, then 41 b4!, whereas now this is dubious because of 41 ... Re8! Here the game was adjourned and White sealed his move.



41 Ne7+!

‘This sealed move initiates the final attack which, after a dozen moves, leads practically by force to the win of the queen for two pieces.’ (Alekhine) Now begins the resumption – the most interesting part of this game. Although White carried out a colossal combination, in fact here things are not so simple: the computer picks up nuances that escaped the attention of painstaking analysts.

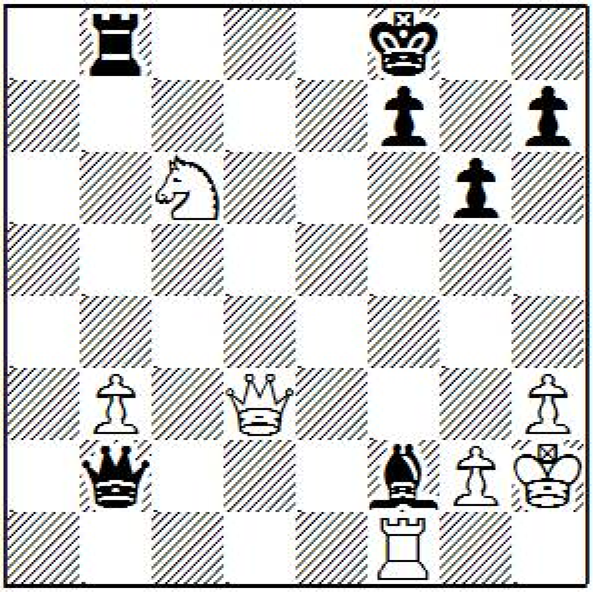
41 ... Kf8!

‘The only move. Hopeless would be 41 ... Kg7 42 Nf5+! gxf5 43 Qg3+ and 44 Qxb8, or 41 ... Kh8 42 Nc6 Bxf2+ 43 Rxf2 Qc1+ 44 Kh2 Qxc6 45 Rxf7 etc.’ (Alekhine)

42 Nc6 Bxf2+ 43 Kh2?

‘Only here.’ (Kotov) ‘The idea of this pawn sacrifice (instead of 43 Rxf2 Qc1+ 44 Qf1! Qxc6 45 Rxf7+ Kg8 46 Rf3 with very problematic winning chances) will become apparent only after the 48th move. The ensuing knight manoeuvre is very spectacular.’ (Alekhine)

All the commentators attach an exclamation mark to 43 Kh2, but in my opinion 43 Rxf2! was in fact strongest, remaining a pawn up with fair winning chances (roughly 50-50). Whereas now these chances could have melted like March snow ...



43 ... Re8?

Apparently, the decisive error: too passive! ‘If 43 ... Rb7, then 44 Qf3 Bb6 (or 44 ... Bc5 45 Qd5) 45 Nd8!, winning at least the exchange,’ writes Alekhine, not noticing the very strong reply 45 ... Qe5+! 46 g3 (if 46 Kh1 Bxd8! 47 Qxb7 Bc7 48 Kg1 Qd4+ with a draw) 46 ... Re7 47 Nxf7 Qe2+ 48 Qxe2 Rxe2+ 49 Kh1 Kg7 and a draw!

After 43 ... Rb7! (a ‘machine’ move!) 44 Qf3 Bb6 I had to seek other ways. If 45 Nd4 Black is saved by both 45 ... Rd7 46 Ne6+ Kg8 47 Qa8+ Bd8 48 Nxd8 Qe5+ 49 Kh1 Qe8 and 45 ... Qxd4 46 Qxb7 Qe5+ 47 g3 Qb2+ 48 Qg2 Qxb3. More cunning is the quiet move 45 Kh1! with a mass of diverse threats, for example: 45 ... Rd7 46 Qg4 Rd5 47 Qb4+ Bc5 48 Qc4 Qd2 49 Nd8! (a ferocious knight!) 49 ... Kg8 50 Nxf7 Qd4 and although White retains an advantage, the position is nevertheless closer to a draw: after the coming exchanges he will remain with an extra pawn that is hard to convert.

Thus, the spectacular Alekhine attack was by no means forced and not even fully correct ...

44 Qf3 Re2

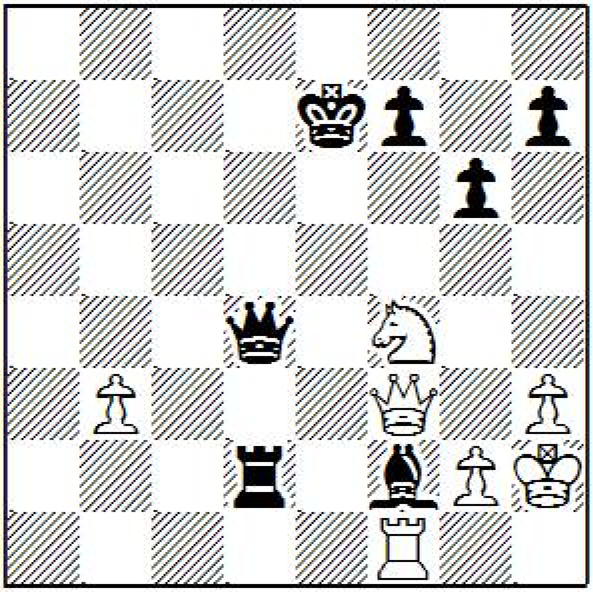
‘Again the only move. But had the white king gone to h1 on the 43rd move, then 44 ... Re1 would have saved Black.’ (Alekhine)

45 Nd4! Rd2 46 Ne6+ Ke7 47 Nf4

With the threat of 48 Nd3. I think that the leaps of this knight must have had Euwe's head spinning: each time this incredibly frisky piece creates new threats!

47 ... Qd4

'Or 47 ... Qc2 48 Ra1 and the exposed king would succumb to the combined attack of the three white pieces.' (Alekhine) And if 47 ... Bd4?, then 48 Qb7+ Ke8 49 Qc8+ Ke7 50 Qc7+ Ke8 51 Nd3! Qxb3 52 Re1+ Kf8 53 Qd8+ or 51 ... Rxg2+ 52 Kh1 wins.



48 Kh1!!

This ultra-brilliant quiet move overwhelms Euwe on the spot. Now 49 Ne2 is threatened.

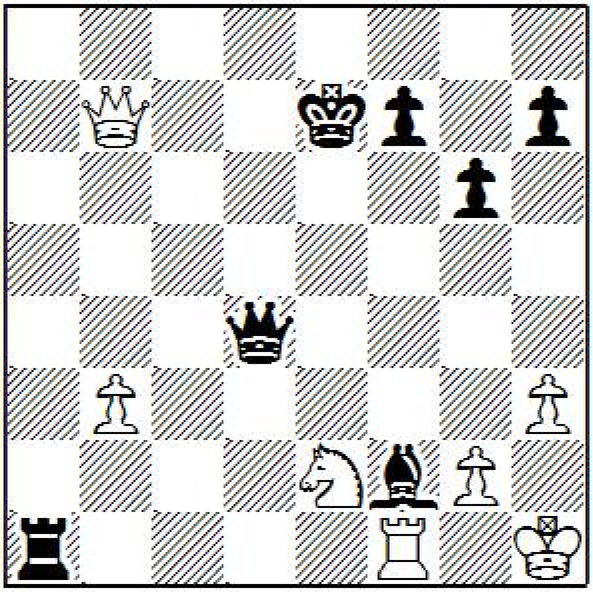
48 ... Ra2?

This looks like a blunder. 48 ... h5? 49 Ne2 Rd1 50 Qb7+ would have come to roughly the same thing. But if Black plays 48 ... Bh4, then according to Alekhine 'he loses as follows: 49 Qb7+ Qd7 (49 ... Kd6 50 Qb8+) 50 Qb4+ Ke8 51 Ne6! Be7 (*51 ... Rd6 52 Qxh4 Rxe6 53 Qxh7 – G. K.*) 52 Qb8+ Bd8 53 Nxd8 Qxd8 54 Qe5+ Qe7 55 Qh8+ Kd7 56 Qxh7 Rf2 57 Rd1+ Kc7 58 Qh8 etc.'

But for a couple of minutes it was unclear to me (and to the computer) how White wins after 48 ... Bh4 49 Qb7+ Ke8! Only another grandiose knight leap was able to help: 50 Ne6!! fxe6 51 Qf7+ Kd8 52 Qf8+ Kc7 53

Rf7+ Kb6 54 Qb8+ Kc5 55 Rc7+ Kd5 56 Rd7+ Ke4 57 Qb7+ Kf5 58 Rxd4 Rxd4 59 Qxh7 winning. This means that 43 ... Re8? was after all the decisive mistake!

49 Ne2! (Euwe had probably reckoned only on 49 Nd3? Ra1 50 Qe2+ Be3) **49 ... Ra1 50 Qb7+!** (but not 50 Nxd4? Rxf1+ 51 Kh2 Bg1+, regaining the queen)



50 ... Kf6?!

Nevertheless more tenacious was 50 ... Kf8 51 Nxd4 Rxf1+ 52 Kh2 Bg1+ 53 Kg3 Bf2+ 54 Kf3 Bxd4+ 55 Ke2 (55 Ke4 Bf6) 55 ... Rf2+ 56 Ke1 Kg7! and White has to bring in his reserve – the passed b-pawn.

51 Nxd4 (the arguments are at an end: White is a queen up) **51 ... Rxf1+ 52 Kh2 Bg1+ 53 Kg3 Bf2+ 54 Kf3 Bxd4+ 55 Ke4 Rd1** (56 Qa6+ was threatened) **56 Qd5?!**

'The simple 56 Qc6+ followed by 57 Qc2 won immediately. This is the only (fortunately negligible) omission I committed in this unusually difficult game.' (Alekhine)

56 ... Ke7

The pawn ending after 56 ... Re1+ 57 Kxd4 Rd1+ 58 Kc5 Rxd5+ 59 Kxd5 Ke7 60 Kc6 is also hopeless.

57 g4 h5 58 gxh5 f5+ 59 Kf3 Rd3+ 60 Ke2 Re3+ 61 Kd2 Re4 62 hxg6 1-0

A worthy finish to the match! In this game the potential of Alekhine's pieces creates an enormous impression.

Here Euwe, by his own admission, mentally reconciled himself to defeat: 'The tension of the struggle had become unbearable for me.' Alekhine also won the 24th and 25th games, and with them the match: 15½-9½ (+10 -4 =11). A convincing victory!

'The result of the return match gives a comprehensively clear reply: Alekhine is not simply a very strong player, but the strongest in the world ... He played wonderfully, and to lose to such an opponent is by no means a disgrace ... He was excellent in all stages, but most of all I admire his mastery of playing adjourned games,' wrote Euwe immediately after the match, and years later he recalled:

'The class demonstrated by Alekhine was at a level that he never again achieved – neither in the AVRO tournament, nor in other events. Where did Alekhine play more strongly – in the return match or in San Remo and Bled? A difficult question. These are qualitatively different competitions: in San Remo and Bled the emphasis was on the fight for an opening advantage and a subsequent "blitzkrieg", while in the return match the play was of a more protracted nature.'

Undefeated

After regaining the title of champion, Alekhine did not give up the cherished dream of visiting his motherland, seeing his sister and his brother Alexey, and strolling around the places of his youth – the quiet Moscow lanes ... But one letter to the newspaper *64* (cf. p.435) proved insufficient to redeem his sins, and in 1936 he sent another couple of penitential letters with 'greetings to the new, iron Russia' and an entreaty about collaboration:

'For me it would be an enormous joy to again play my part in the chess construction of the USSR. I hope that my mistakes in the past, of which I am now fully aware, will not prove an insurmountable obstacle ... (There follows a list of mistakes! – G. K.) I so deeply regret these mistakes, that in recent years my indifferent attitude to the gigantic growth of Soviet achievements has transformed into admiration.'

It is not known with whom Commissar Krylenko consulted in the Kremlin, but the question of Alekhine contributing to the Soviet newspaper *64* was not in fact resolved – these letters remained unanswered and came to light ... only 31 years later (in the magazine *Shakhmaty v SSSR* 1967, No.9).

Meanwhile, the ‘gigantic growth of Soviet achievements’ was expressed in the brutal Stalinist repressions, which were especially extensive in 1937-39. In the summer of 1938 the formidable Krylenko was shot ... And in the autumn the secret police retrieved from the 18-year-old archival dust ‘case No.228 against A. A. Alekhine with a supplement of 10 pages.’ However, these were meaningless difficulties: the Russian chess genius did not in fact travel to the USSR.

... On the conclusion of the return match, the champion was reminded of the decision of the 14th FIDE congress (Stockholm 1937) to recognise the official challenger to the throne to be grandmaster Flohr, who had ‘defeated’ Capablanca on the number of votes cast to him: 8-5. Initially Alekhine turned Flohr down, since precisely at that time an offer was received from Montevideo to stage his match with Capablanca. Alas, on this occasion too nothing came of this: the champion demanded that the conditions of the 1927 match should be repeated, whereas the ex-champion wanted a more favourable distribution of the prize fund. Alekhine wrote angrily that the Cuban did not in fact want to play, and that the entire clamour over his challenge served as an advertisement for ‘an ageing chess prima donna’.

However, he also did not come to play Flohr, although in May 1938 the champion and the challenger signed an agreement about a match in Prague, which was due to take place in the autumn of 1939 in various towns of Czechoslovakia. The prize fund was guaranteed by the well-known footwear factory Tomas Bata. But in late September 1938 all the plans were disrupted by the notorious ‘Munich agreement’, allowing Hitler’s Germany to seize from Czechoslovakia part of its territory, and soon also to occupy the entire country ...

The major, truly symbolic event of the end of that decade was the famous AVRO tournament (Holland 2-27 November 1938), where the best eight players on the planet battled it out in a double-round event: 1-2. Keres and Fine – 8½ out of 14; 3. Botvinnik – 7½; 4-6. Alekhine, Reshevsky and Euwe – 7; 7. Capablanca – 6; 8. Flohr – 4½. The play was held in various towns, and the constant travelling took its toll on the ‘old men’, the third and fourth world champions, but at the same time it was clear that new stars had begun shining in the chess sky.

I will describe this historic tournament in more detail in the second volume, and I will merely mention that Alekhine suffered three defeats (against Botvinnik and twice against Fine), and will dwell on two games that were especially important for him. It stands to reason that these were the clashes with Capablanca: the time had come to settle old scores!

‘During the last 11 years meetings between Alekhine and Capablanca have been extremely rare,’ Tartakower wrote in his report on the tournament. ‘Their personal enmity, based on fact that the world was too small for two such ambitious natures, who should have been separated from each other not only by continents, but also by different centuries (*that’s it: I remember that it was once said about Karpov and me that two tigers find it crowded in one cage! – G. K.*), shows through in every move and adversely affects the quality of their play. That was the case in Nottingham 1936, and that was also the case here ... ’

And about their duel in the second round: ‘Again Alekhine’s game is the only one unfinished, but on this occasion he has to try and save it ... Ten minutes before the resumption both players are already in the hall and both look rather exhausted. It is obvious that both have been up all night studying the subtleties of the adjourned position. But from the very first moves it is clear that the Cuban has not delved too deeply into all the nooks and crannies. Soon he even puts on his “glasses No.2”. But this is a sign of dissatisfaction ... and after a fine reply by Alekhine he immediately agrees to a draw.’

But *what* an agreement that was! Let’s read the Dutch press: ‘Alekhine made the last move in the game – placed his bishop close to Capablanca’s king, stood up from the board and began strolling about while he awaited the reply. Capablanca sat down at the board (during the half-hour adjournment session the two players had barely spent more than a few minutes together at the board), scrutinised the position and called over the tournament director Landau. They whispered together for a few seconds, and Landau went out into the passage; but he immediately returned, went up to Alekhine and whispered something in his ear. Alekhine nodded his head affirmatively. Then Landau went up to the stage and, in turn, nodded to Capablanca. The inscription “Draw” appeared on the demonstration board. It was this secret word that had been communicated by whisper.’

No less dramatic was their second encounter. ‘Not a struggle, but a kind of wild dance of the pieces was seen in the French game Alekhine-

Capablanca. The world champion decided, apparently, to celebrate worthily the 50th birthday of his Cuban colleague. Not knowing whether he should press on the strategic or the tactical pedals, Capablanca lost the thread, and with it ... a piece, and to crown all his misfortunes – his control of the clock: on the 35th move his flag fell.' (Tartakower)

Game 147

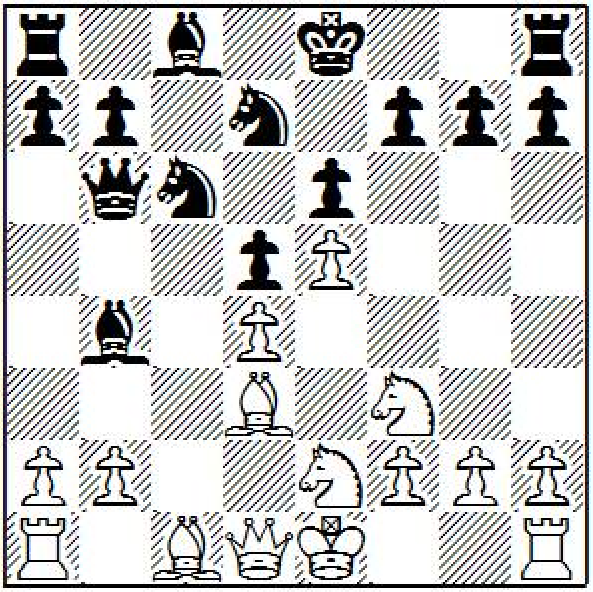
A.Alekhine-J.R.Capablanca

AVRO Tournament, Holland 1938

French Defence C06

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ne2 Qb6 (nowadays the immediate 7 ... cxd4 8 cxd4 f6! leads to sharp debates) **8 Nf3 cxd4 9 cxd4 Bb4+?!**

Here too 9 ... f6 is better.



10 Kf1!?

'This leads to more spirited play, whereas after 10 Bd2 Black can force the exchange of queens. But in this particular game I was aiming to win at all costs, because I had some kind of premonition that this would be my last game with Capablanca. It is true that it might have happened differently, since we could still have met at the Olympiad in Buenos Aires (1939), but he avoided this meeting.' (Alekhine)

10 ... Be7 (10 ... 0-0? 11 Bxh7+!; 10 ... f6?! 11 Nf4!) **11 a3 Nf8?!**

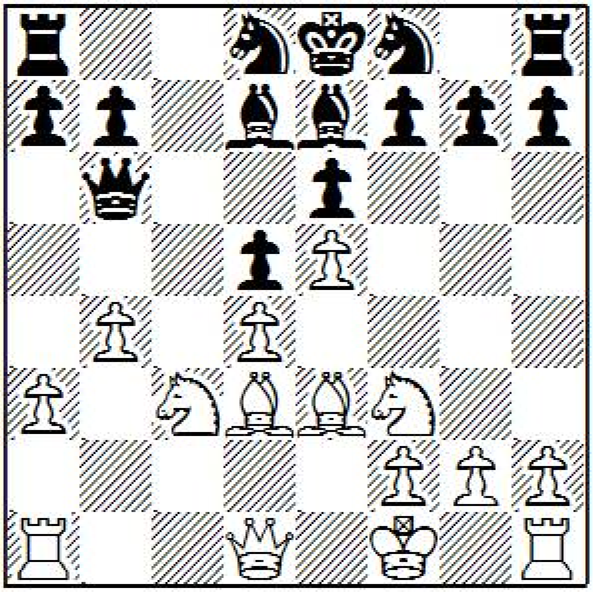
'The start of a complicated regrouping which does not lead to a satisfactory result.' (Alekhine) After 11 ... 0-0 Alekhine suggested 12 Qc2 and Euwe – 12 h4! But perhaps 11 ... a5!? was sounder.

12 b4 Bd7 13 Be3 Nd8?!

Hoping for ... Bd7-b5. Panov recommended 13 ... Rc8 14 Rc1 a5, and Kotov – 13 ... f5, adding 'It is hard to play an important game on the day of your 50th birthday.'

14 Nc3

'Black's position is already extremely difficult.' (Panov)



14 ... a5?!

'A very unfortunate manoeuvre, but such moves are usually made in already compromised positions.' (Alekhine) If 14 ... Ng6, then 15 h4! 0-0 16 h5 Nh8 17 Qc2 (Euwe), while if 14 ... a6 or 14 ... Rc8, then 15 Na4! is strong.

15 Na4! (but not 15 b5 a4 with some counterplay) **15 ... Qa7**

15 ... Bxa4 16 Qxa4+ Nc6 17 Ke2! is clearly to White's advantage, for example: 17 ... Nd7 18 Rhb1 (Euwe), 17 ... Rc8 18 b5 Na7 19 Rhc1 Nd7 20

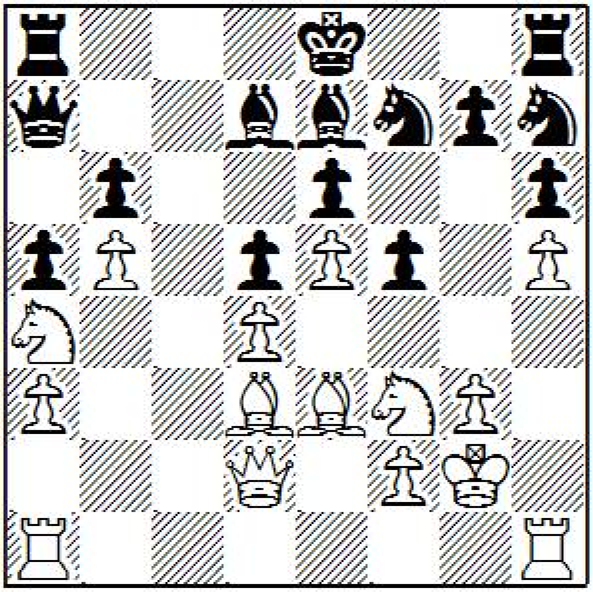
Rxc8+ Nxc8 21 Rc1, or 17 ... Ng6 18 h4 0-0 19 b5! Nd8 20 Qc2 (Panov).

16 b5 b6

‘Now the position on the queenside is completely fixed and White needs to arouse the kingside into action.’ (Alekhine)

17 g3 f5 18 Kg2 Nf7 (beginning a battle ‘for’ and ‘against’ ... g7-g5) **19 Qd2!** (19 Rc1?! g5!) **19 ... h6 20 h4 Nh7 21 h5!**

‘Completely suppressing the threat of ... g7-g5. It is true that this move gives the black knight temporary use of g5, but on the other hand it secures the g6-square.’ (Alekhine)



21 ... Nfg5 (21 ... 0-0!?) **22 Nh4 Ne4 23 Qb2 Kf7?!**

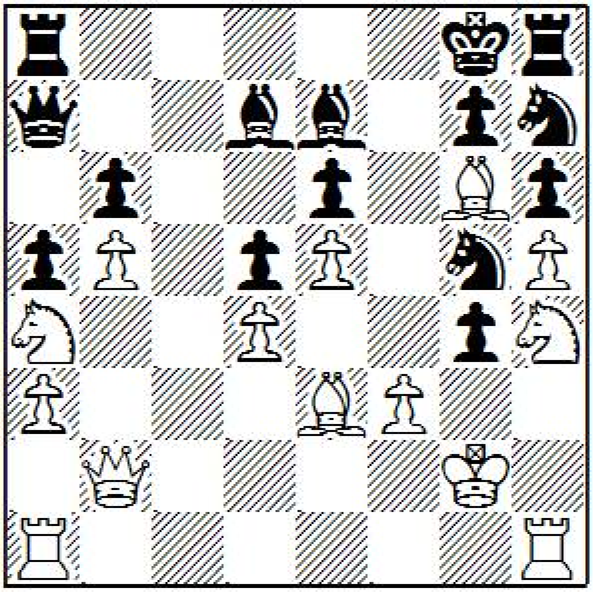
‘Black cannot prevent the knight from occupying a dominating position at g6, since 23 ... Bxh4?! 24 gxh4! would cost the life of the knight at e4.’ (Alekhine) But, in Kotov’s opinion, 23 ... 0-0 was more tenacious.

24 f3 Neg5

‘Now the breaching of Black’s kingside begins.’ (Alekhine)

25 g4 fxg4 26 Bg6+! Kg8

If 26 ... Kf8, then 27 Rhf1! is good, for example: 27 ... g3 28 f4 Ne4 29 f5! Bxh4 30 fxe6+ (Panov), or 27 ... gxf3+ 28 Nxf3 Kg8 29 Nxg5 Nxg5 30 Bxg5 Bxg5 31 Nxb6!! Qxb6 32 Qf2 winning (Euwe).



27 f4! Nf3?!

Desperation! After 27 ... Nf7 Alekhine was also intending 28 Bxh7+ Rxh7 (28 ... Kxh7? 29 Qb1+ Kg8 30 Ng6) 29 Ng6. I agree, that after the approximate 29 ... Bd8 30 Rac1 Nh8 31 Qe2 Nxg6 32 hxg6 Rh8 33 Qxg4 Rc8 34 Rc6! Black is in trouble. But apparently even better is Panov's idea of 28 Bd3! (threatening Ng6) 28 ... Bxh4 29 Rxh4 followed by the doubling of rooks on the g-file and a winning attack.

28 Bxh7+! Rxh7 (or 28 ... Kxh7 29 Qb1+ Kg8 30 Ng6) **29 Ng6 Bd8 30 Rac1!**

'At first sight it was simpler to play 30 Kg3 and Kxg4, trapping the knight, but then Black would have gained quite good chances by 30 ... Rc8 31 Rac1 (31 Kxg4 Rc4!, saving the piece) 31 ... Rc4! and the black knight is a long way from being lost. The move in the game, by depriving Black of counterplay on the c-file, eliminates this chance.' (Alekhine)

30 ... Be8 (there isn't anything more useful) **31 Kg3! Qf7 32 Kxg4 Nh4**

Or 32 ... Ng5 33 fxg5 Qf5+ 34 Kg3 Bxg5 35 Rcf1 winning.

33 Nxh4 Qxh5+ 34 Kg3 Qf7 35 Nf3

And in this hopeless position, while playing 35 ... h5, for only the second time in his life (the first was in his game with Ryumin, Moscow 1935) Capa lost on time. Not a bad 'present' for his birthday! The overall score of decisive games between these historic opponents was fixed forever at 7-7. Caissa is severe, but just ...

So, since Flohr was no longer one of the challengers, the organisers of the AVRO tournament proclaimed that the winner would receive the preferential right to a match with Alekhine. But at the opening ceremony the champion rigidly declared that, although he would accept the challenge of the winner, if the latter could guarantee the due ‘competitive and financial conditions’, in principle he considered that he had the right to play with any well-known grandmaster who could raise the necessary prize fund.

‘I took good note of this: it was then that I had to decide whether to challenge the world champion to a match,’ writes Botvinnik. ‘I didn’t know when I would see Alekhine again ... ’

It was Keres who was declared the AVRO winner, on the tie-break – and he immediately requested an audience with Alekhine, in order to have discussions about a match: little Estonia (apparently, following the example of Cuba and Holland) was ready to support its hero ... Alekhine replied with an agreement, but they did not in fact meet – Paul waited in vain for the champion in the hall of the Carlton Hotel.

Keres had been forestalled by Botvinnik! This is how he described his meeting with Alekhine: ‘I invited Flohr with me: an authoritative witness was needed – wasn’t Alekhine linked with the white emigrants? Caution was necessary. But since the time of Nottingham, Alexander Alexandrovich had related warmly to me. Alekhine the chess player sensed my admiration – this disarmed him. No sooner had we seen each other before the tournament in Amsterdam, when he began talking about a new star – Smyslov (Alekhine had found a mistake in an analysis published by Smyslov!). Now too he was affable with us both, since earlier he had been intending to play a match with Flohr (Flohr, of course, was upset, that it was not him, but someone else who was negotiating about a match, but he didn’t let it show). Over a cup of tea the conditions were quickly agreed: if the match was to take place in Moscow, three months before the champion would be invited to some tournament – to adapt to the conditions in Moscow ... ’

Irrespective of the outcome of the match, Alekhine would receive $6,700 (i.e. two thirds of the prize fund of $10,000). As Botvinnik writes, they agreed to keep this meeting a strict secret, shook hands firmly and parted ... never to see each other again.

And here is another important piece of evidence by Botvinnik: ‘After the tournament a meeting of the players was held – a unique one in the history of chess. Simultaneously in the hall were seven players (Alekhine and Capablanca took turns to be present). They discussed the question of setting up a club of the eight strongest, so that the club should confirm the rules of matches for the world championship. Alekhine was agreeable to a prize fund of $10,000, with one exception: Capablanca would have to raise $18,000 (i.e. 10,000 in gold – on these conditions their match in 1927 was held). Each member of the club would have the formal right to challenge the champion. Fine and Euwe were entrusted with preparing and circulating the draft rules (no one suggested enlisting FIDE in the solving of these questions).’

Alas, all these ventures, like many, many others, were buried by the Second World War ...

In the early autumn of 1939 Alekhine and Capablanca saw each another for the last time in their lives – at the Olympiad in unforgettable Buenos Aires. There they had an extremely sharp rivalry in the battle for the best result on board 1: both went through undefeated, Alekhine scoring 12½ out of 16, and Capa 11½ ... but only the games played in the final counted, and here Capa had 8½ out of 11, and Alekhine ‘only’ 7½ out of 10. So as not to spoil things, the ex-champion even missed the France-Cuba match. ‘On the day of the match,’ an eye-witness recalled, ‘Alekhine arrived in the tournament hall half an hour early and walked resolutely around the stage, working himself up for the game with Capablanca. He was beside himself when the Cubans turned out with a reserve. Alekhine crushed him in 20 moves, but he was unable to hide his anger.’

As a result the French took 10th place and the Cubans 11th. But the Estonians, led by Keres, who scored 14½ out of 19, were a sensational third, behind Germany and Poland! To the horror of Alekhine, and indeed all the players, at the very height of the tournament, just as a quarter of a century earlier in Mannheim, war broke out. Alekhine and Tartakower called for a boycott of the German team as a sign of protest against the attack by Nazi Germany on Poland, and the French and the Poles, and the Palestinians who joined with them, refused to play the Germans (in each case an arbitrary 2-2 score was recorded).

The subsequent tragic fate of the fourth world champion has been described in detail in chess literature, and therefore I shall only mention the most important points.

That same autumn in South America, through intermediaries, the slow-moving discussions about a return match with Capablanca were renewed. While things were being decided, Alekhine returned to Paris and joined the French Army as a military interpreter. In the summer of 1940, after the capitulation of France, Alexander and Grace Alekhine found themselves in German occupied territory. They dreamed of escaping via Portugal to America, where the Russian player might finally succeed in finding a common language with the Cubans – who could know that Capa had only eighteen months to live ...

In the spring of 1941 the Germans allowed Alekhine to go to Lisbon, but at too high a price: without his wife and in exchange for a scandalous series of anti-Semitic articles *Jewish and Arian Chess*, published in France, Holland and Germany. To save the life and freedom of Grace, who, according to Alekhine's 'Swiss' son, was an American Jewess, the champion accepted the conditions of the Nazis: he returned to Prague and began playing in competitions of 'The Chess Union of Greater Germany'.

During the war years he played in sixteen tournaments, winning nine of them and sharing first place in four others. At one time he and Grace were ordered to live in Prague, and there in the winter of 1942/43 Alekhine nearly died of severe scarlet fever – by a strange coincidence, in the very same hospital where his friend Réti died of this disease in 1929. Recovering a little, he brilliantly won the April tournament Prague 1943: 1. Alekhine – 17 out of 19 (undefeated); 2. Keres – 14½ (the duel between the top two prize-winners ended in a draw).

The 50-year-old champion conducted the following game with enormous energy and youthful enthusiasm, exploiting the most varied tactical motifs in his deeply calculated combination.

Game 148

A.Alekhine-J.Podgorny

Prague 1943

Sicilian Defence B22

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 (nowadays the main reply is 2 ... Nf6) **3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4**

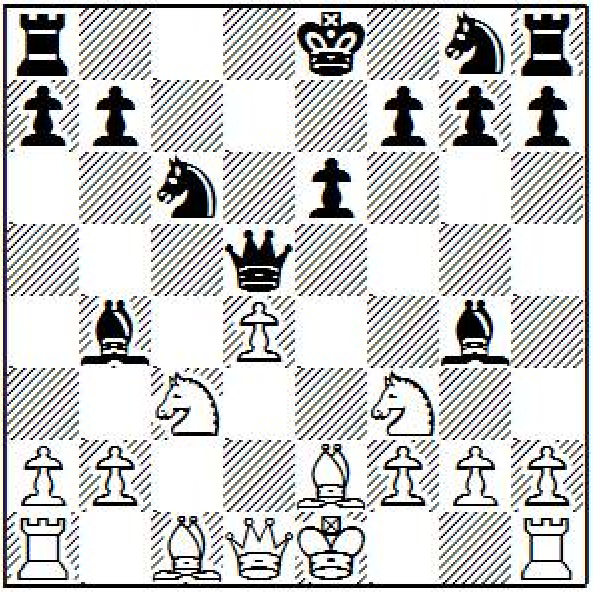
Nc6

More accurate is 4 ... Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4 6 Be2 e6, as I too have played – against Kramnik (Paris rapidplay 1994) and twice against Deep Blue (Philadelphia 1st and 3rd matchgames 1996).

5 Nf3 (moves such as 5 dxc5 are not in the style of the fourth world champion) **5 ... Bg4 6 Be2 cxd4**

‘6 ... e6 7 h3 Bh5 8 c4 and d4-d5 favours White.’ (Alekhine)

7 cxd4 e6 8 Nc3 Bb4



8 ... Qa5!? 9 0-0 Nf6 10 h3 Bh5 11 a3 would have led to a position from the game Capablanca-Czerniak (Buenos Aires Olympiad 1939), which caused a sensation at the time and went 11 ... Rd8? 12 g4 Bg6 13 b4! Bxb4?! 14 axb4! Qxa1 15 Qb3 Rxd4 16 Ba3! Bc2 17 Qxc2 Qxa3 18 Nb5! and Black was spectacularly crushed. But clearly better was 11 ... Be7 (or 11 ... Bd6) 12 Be3 0-0 13 b4 Qd8, which became a *tabiya* at the end of the 20th century.

9 0-0 Qa5

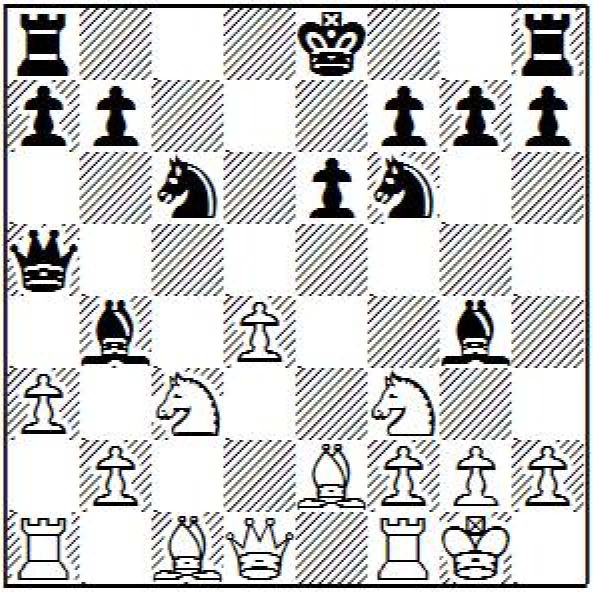
‘A critical position. If White does not find the correct continuation, the weakness of his isolated pawn may subsequently cause him serious difficulties.’ (Alekhine)

10 a3!

If 10 Bd2 Nf6 11 a3 Alekhine gives 11 ... Be7! (inferior is 11 ... Bxc3 12 bxc3 Ne4?! 13 Be1!) 12 Nb5 Qd8 13 Rc1 0-0, ‘and White has nothing concrete’, while if 10 d5 – 10 ... Rd8 (but not 10 ... 0-0-0?! 11 Ng5!) 11 Ng5 Bf5! with a double-edged position, or even 10 ... exd5!? 11 Qxd5 (11 Nxd5 0-0-0) 11 ... Qxd5 (11 ... Bxc3!? 12 Qe4+ Be6 13 bxc3 Nf6) 12 Nxd5 Bd6 with an acceptable game.

Therefore White preferred to go along a purely combinative path, exploiting the current position of Black’s king and queen.

10 ... Nf6?



A natural developing move ... and the decisive mistake! Essential was 10 ... Bxc3 11 bxc3 Nf6 or 11 ... Nge7 with only a slightly inferior position. Whereas after the greedy 11 ... Qxc3? both 12 Bd2 Qb2 13 Qa4! and 12 Rb1 are strong, for example: 12 ... 0-0-0 13 Qa4 Bxf3 14 Bxf3 Nge7 15 Qb5 Rd7 16 Bf4! Qxd4? 17 Bxc6 Nxc6 18 Qxc6+!, or 12 ... Nge7 13 Rxb7 0-0 14 Qa4! with irresistible threats.

For complete happiness Black only needs to castle, and Alekhine, exploiting the temporary lack of coordination of the enemy forces, launches a swift attack.

11 d5!

The opening of the e-file is the keystone of White’s attack. ‘The only way: after 11 axb4? Qxa1 12 Qb3 Bxf3 13 Be3 Qxf1+ 14 Bxf1 Bd5 15

Nxd5 Nxd5 16 b5 Nce7 and ... 0-0 Black could still have defended.' (Alekhine) And in the event of 11 Qb3 Bxc3 12 Qxb7 0-0 13 Qxc6 (13 bxc3 Rfc8!) 13 ... Bxf3 14 Qxf3 (or 14 Bxf3 Rac8 15 Qd6 Rfd8) 14 ... Bxd4 he altogether has nothing to complain of.

11 ... exd5

'After 11 ... Rd8 (or 11 ... 0-0-0) there would have followed 12 Qb3 with the threat of 13 axb4 Qxa1 14 Be3, while if 11 ... Nxd5 – 12 Nxd5 exd5 13 axb4! (*13 Nd4!? – G. K.*) 13 ... Qxa1 14 Qb3 Bxf3 15 Bg5! Qxf1+ 16 Bxf1 Be4 17 f3 winning a pawn in view of the lack of coordination of the black pieces.' (Alekhine) For example: 17 ... Bf5 18 Qxd5 Be6 19 Qe4 and 19 ... 0-0? 20 Bd3! g6 21 Bf6 leads to a catastrophe on the dark squares.

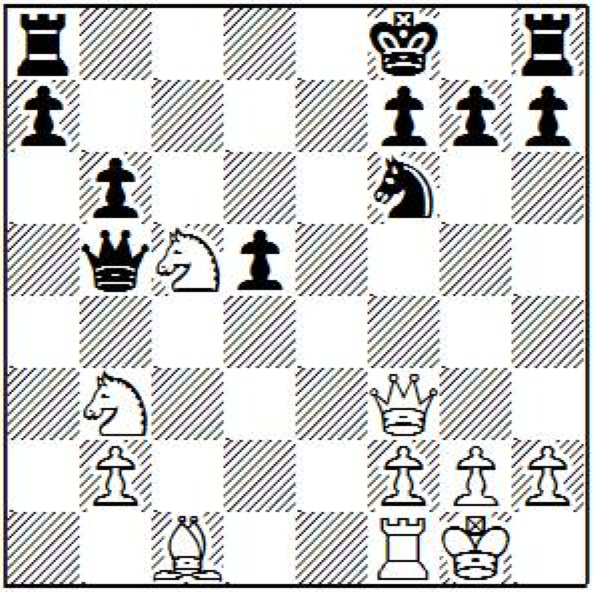
Also after 11 ... Bxf3 12 dxc6 Bxe2 13 cxb7! Rb8 (13 ... Rd8 14 axb4! wins) 14 axb4! Qxa1 15 Qxe2 'the black queen cannot escape from the trap.' (Kotov) More interesting is 12 ... Bxc6!? 13 axb4 Qxa1 14 Qc2, and here not the continuation mentioned by the commentators: 14 ... b5? 15 Nxb5! (I should add 15 ... Kd7 16 Bg5! or 15 ... 0-0 16 Qxc6 Rac8 17 Nc7 Nd5 18 Qa6!), but 14 ... Nd5!? 15 b5 Nb4 16 Qb3 Bxg2 17 Kxg2 Qa5 with hopes of prolonging the resistance somewhat.

12 axb4! Qxa1 13 Nd2!

Every soldier is at his post! The threat of Nb3 forces the exchange of bishops, and the white queen comes into play with check, creating serious threats to the black king. The plan of trapping the queen by 13 Qb3 is again pointless, this time in view of 13 ... Bxf3 14 Be3 (14 Bg5? even loses: 14 ... Nd4!) 14 ... Qxf1+ 15 Bxf1 d4! and after the series of exchanges White has no attack.

13 ... Bxe2 14 Qxe2+ Ne7

'If 14 ... Kf8, then 15 Nb3 Qa6 16 b5 Qb6 17 Na4! Nd4! 18 Qd1!! (*but not 18 Qd3? Qxb5 – G. K.*) and White wins.' (Alekhine) This clever queen retreat (with a latent defence of the knight at a4: 18 ... Qxb5 19 Nxd4) had to be foreseen when 11 d5! was played. Now Black loses his knight and, despite approximate material equality (rook and two pawns for knight and bishop), he remains with an incurably sick king. Let us try fantasising a little: 18 ... Nf3+ 19 Qxf3 Qxb5 20 Nac5 b6.



Analysis diagram

The white knights are again in difficulties, but the capture of the king is worth any sacrifices: 21 Bh6!! Kg8 (21 ... gxh6 22 Qxf6 Rg8 23 Ne6+ Ke8 24 Nc7+ Ke8 24 Nc7+ and 25 Nxb5) 22 Nd4! Qxc5 23 Nf5 Qc7 (23 ... g6 loses immediately: 24 Qc3! Qxc3 25 Ne7 mate) 24 Bxg7 Qe5 25 Bh6 with the same threat of 26 Qg3+ Qxg3 27 Ne7 mate, and if 25 ... Re8, then 26 Qh3! and 27 f4 wins.

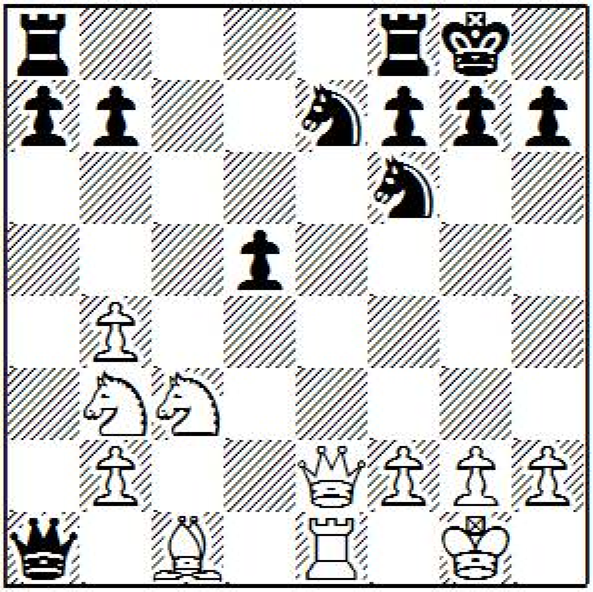
15 Re1! (according to Alekhine, ‘15 Qb5+?! Nd7 16 Re1 was more tempting but weaker because of 16 ... Kd8!’) **15 ... 0-0**

The only way of avoiding an immediate rout. The black king escapes, exploiting the fact that the knight is immune: 16 Qxe7?? Rfe8 wins.

Can it be that the pretty winning combination in the variation with 14 ... Kf8 was merely a mirage in the desert?

16 Nb3!

The winning stroke! Now the white queen leaves the e-file with gain of tempo (by exchanging!) and the rook can very calmly pick up the knight.



16 ... Qa6 17 Qxa6 bxa6 18 Rxe7

White has a bishop and knight for a rook and Alekhine easily converts his material advantage.

18 ... Rab8 (if 18 ... Rfb8, then 19 Na2 Re8 20 Rxe8+ Rxe8 21 h3 is good) **19 b5!**

'This advance prevents the penetration of one of the black rooks into White's position.' (Alekhine)

19 ... axb5 20 Rxa7 b4 21 Ne2 Rfc8 22 f3 Ra8 (the black rooks have no scope: 22 ... Rc2 23 Nbd4!) **23 Rxa8 Rxa8 24 Kf2**

Sometimes in the endgame a rook and pawn are even stronger than a pair of minor pieces, but here this is not such a case: Alekhine's pieces coordinate excellently, and the white king comes into play with decisive effect, whereas its black opponent is forced to observe passively the destruction of its army.

24 ... Nd7 25 Nf4 Nb6 26 Ke3 Rc8 27 Kd3 (with the threat of 28 Be3 Nc4 29 Bd4) **27 ... g5 28 Nh5 1-0**

28 ... h6 29 Be3 Nc4 30 Nf6+ Kf8 31 Bc5+ Kg7 32 Bd4 wins.

Then there was Salzburg 1943: 1-2. Alekhine and Keres – 7½ out of 10 ... 4. Bogoljubow – 4. The last meeting of the two old friends and rivals – after their 1934 match Alekhine played 12 games with Bogoljubow with an overall score of +8 -2 =2.

At that time the champion several times invited the young Keres, who was also caught ‘under the Germans’, to play a match for the world championship. Keres declined, and Alekhine somewhat sarcastically commented: ‘They all want to wait till I’m past 60.’ But historians state that Paul ‘rejected a match, not out of fear or calculation, but due to depression caused by the war.’

The Estonian master Walter Heuer adds: ‘During the war Keres realised that, out of all the contenders for the chess crown, he alone had ended up “on the wrong side” and he endeavoured to survive that period with the minimum of damage, by avoiding a compromising match with Alekhine. Not too much significance should be added to his poor score (0-3) in their individual meetings in 1942 – Keres had been out of practice for a long time ... In 1943 they played on equal terms, and in the event of a match the champion’s undermined health could well have told.’

And indeed, according to Flohr the champion’s health left much to be desired back in the 1935 match, where he was let down by his nervous system several times and where a Dutch doctor who examined him stated: ‘I am afraid that Alekhine will not live for long, with his diseased heart ... Nerves!’

In the autumn of 1943, at the invitation of the Spanish Chess Federation, the champion travelled to Madrid, and again alone: the Gestapo refused to allow his wife to leave. For about two years he played in small Spanish tournaments, gave simultaneous displays and gave lessons to the young Arturo Pomar, the future well-known grandmaster. He tried unsuccessfully to obtain permission for Grace to travel to Spain, and on the conclusion of the war he made equally unsuccessful attempts to return to Paris. From the USSR news reached him of the death of his elder sister (his brother had died back in 1939). In the autumn of 1945 he moved to the small Portuguese town of Estoril, where he had a good friend – Francisco Lupi.

‘Suffering from loneliness and illness, the world champion was hoping to wait until the end of that dangerous time, when all over Europe they were seeking and judging war criminals and collaborators,’ writes the well-known pianist Dmitry Paperno in his memoirs. ‘You can imagine those months in the life of the great player: autumn and winter in foreign and provincial Estoril, the boom of the ocean, the half-empty hotel, where he was kept virtually on charity, no contact with his wife, despairing letters to former friends, in which he tried to justify himself. And all this on the background of high blood pressure (up to 280), impecunity and alcohol – that which remained from his rare payments for game commentaries and simultaneous displays, organised by Lupi, went on cognac.'

At the end of November came a ray of hope: the British Chess Federation sent Alekhine an invitation to their first post-war tournaments – in London and in Hastings. The inspired recluse sent his immediate agreement and began preparing. But then came the terrible news that, due to a protest by the American Chess Federation, the invitation had been cancelled! Alekhine had a heart attack ... Gathering his thoughts, the champion sent a letter to the organisers of the London tournament (which was published in the *British Chess Magazine*, 1946 No.1 and, with a slightly different translation, in *Chess* 1946 No.1):

The fact is that, in Germany and in occupied territory, we were under constant supervision and the threat of the concentration camp on the part of the Gestapo ...

I have played chess in Germany and occupied countries because this was our only means of livelihood, but also the price I paid for my wife's liberty.

In these articles, which appeared in 1941 during my stay in Portugal, and which became known to me in Germany as reproduced in the *Deutsche Schachzeitung* there is nothing that was written by me.

The matter which I had provided related to the necessary reconstruction of the International Chess Federation and to a critical appreciation, written long before 1939 of the theories of Steinitz and Lasker.

I was astonished ... at the reaction which these purely technical articles had produced in America.

It is only when I obtained knowledge of the perfectly stupid balderdash which emanated from a mind imbued with Nazi ideas, that I understood what was on foot. At that time I was a prisoner of the Nazis and our only chance was to keep silent before the whole world.

The vapourings of the *Pariser Zeitung* were a fake.

One would like to believe Alexander Alexandrovich to the end, but chess historians have unearthed two interviews by the champion, published in the Spanish press on 3 September 1941, before his departure to the Munich tournament. In them Alekhine declared that 'in the newspaper

Pariser Zeitung he first tried to examine chess from a racial viewpoint,' reported on his intention to read several lectures 'about Aryan and Semitic types of chess', and to the question, which chess players he admired, he replied: 'I must specially mention the greatness of Capablanca, who was called on to overthrow the Jew Lasker from the world chess throne.'

Truly 'What terrible times, what cruel people!' Four years later fascism vanished, like a terrible dream, but the champion was left empty-handed. 'Far-sighted and profound at the chessboard, in life Alekhine more than once demonstrated political short-sightedness,' Botvinnik was to say coldly and ... he would obtain permission from the Kremlin for a match with the 'enemy of the people'. The world crown was at stake!

Early in March 1946 Alekhine received an official challenge from Botvinnik, dated 4th February. Of course, he immediately sent his agreement and through joy – life was returning to normal! – he suffered another heart attack ... Through English intermediaries the players agreed that the match would take place in London. But on 24 March the chess world was stunned by the news of the sudden death of the 53-year-old champion, who was found in his room sitting immobile in a chair in front of a chessboard.

Alekhine's death was just as mysterious and tragic as his life. His son later hinted that 'the hand of Moscow touched his father', but in the official evidence it was said that 'Alekhine died as a result of asphyxiation due to the blocking of his larynx by a piece of meat,' although certain eye-witnesses asserted that, to judge by the calm expression on the deceased's face, 'this was not the main cause of death, but it had simply coincided with a heart attack.'

The fourth world champion was buried in Estoril. Ten years later, through the efforts of the faithful Grace, his remains were moved to Paris and interred in the Montparnesse cemetery. The inscription over the tombstone there reads: 'Alexandre Alekhine – Génie des échecs de Russie et de France.'

I will conclude, as usual, with a selection of original opinions by the world champions.

Lasker: 'Alekhine grew out of the combination. He is in love with it. Everything strategic is only a preparation for him, almost a necessary evil. The stunning blow, the unexpected thrust – this is his element ... His imagination catches fire in the attack on the king.'

Capablanca: ‘A typical Slav, fair-haired and blue-eyed, Alekhine always catches the attention when he appears in the tournament hall. He speaks six languages fluently, he has the degree of Doctor of Law and his general maturity is significantly higher than the level of the average person. Alekhine evidently possesses the most remarkable chess memory that has ever existed. It is said that he remembers by heart all the games played by the leading masters during the past 15-20 years.’

Euwe: ‘As a person Alekhine was an enigma. He was focused on his chess and on himself to such a degree that in our countries he was jokingly called “Alein-ich” (in German “I am alone”). With such a frame of mind he could not have any real friends, only admirers and supporters. In his nature there was something childish ... If Alekhine is regarded in this light, he can be forgiven for much: at the chessboard he was mighty, but away from chess, by contrast, he resembled a little boy, who played pranks and naively assumed that no one could see him.’

Botvinnik: ‘Alekhine is dear to the chess world, mainly as an artist. Typical of him are deep plans, far-sighted calculation and inexhaustible imagination. However, his main strength, which developed from year to year, was his combinative vision: he saw combinations and calculated forcing variations with great ease and accuracy. For this reason Alekhine’s combinations possessed such a staggering, crushing force ... Yes, this truly was an amazing gift!’

Smyslov: ‘The name of Alekhine is illuminated by the brilliance of his chess combinations. Alekhine possessed an exceptionally rich chess imagination, and his skill in creating combinative complications is incomparable. It should be mentioned that Alekhine had a mastery of technique, and his striving for combinations was not an end in itself, but stemmed logically from the demands of the position.’

Tal: ‘In Alekhine we are captivated by his exceptional combinative talent and his whole-hearted love for chess.’

Spassky: ‘I consider Alexander Alekhine to be a very great player. Possibly, because for me and for many he remains an enigma. He considered that chess was closest to an art, and he was able to demonstrate this with his optimistic, eternally youthful play.’

Fischer: ‘Alekhine has never been a hero of mine, and I’ve never cared for his style of play. There’s nothing light or breezy about it; it worked for him, but it could scarcely work for anybody else.

‘He played gigantic conceptions, full of outrageous and unprecedented ideas. He had great imagination; he could see more deeply into a situation than any other player in chess history ... Many consider Alekhine a great opening theoretician, but I don’t think he was. He played book lines, but didn’t know them very well. He always felt that his natural powers would get him out of any dilemma.’

Karpov: ‘The next (after Steinitz) changes were outlined by Alekhine, but applied and developed by Botvinnik – the scientific approach to chess ... Alekhine worked a great deal at home. He won a number of well-known games, by right from the opening holding his opponent in a vice prepared at home. And his grip was strong: after seizing his victim, he would no longer release him.’

In contrast to Fischer with his propensity for clarity, and to Karpov who grew up on Capablanca’s games, from my early years I was enormously influenced by Alekhine’s play and won over by his unprecedented feat in the 1927 match. I admired the refinement of his ideas, and I tried as far as possible to imitate his furious attacking style, with its sudden and thunderous sacrifices ...

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